

# Editorial

## How to run a Prayer Meeting badly

I have had the privilege of attending more different congregational and other prayer meetings than I could possibly count. Some have been well run and the gathered company have done serious business with God in the great service of intercession. There has been an atmosphere of deep devotion and as both mature and young Christians have taken part—some praying with holy fervour and some with touching simplicity—we have all been lifted to the gates of heaven and have bowed before the throne of God.

On the other hand, I have attended other prayer meetings which have been extremely discouraging. Not that one's faith was at all shaken in the power of prevailing prayer; rather that an oppressive heaviness hung like a dark cloud over the gathering making it hard to battle through to God's presence.

I have often asked myself what it is that can make or mar a prayer gathering. With some hesitation and not a little

reluctance, I want to think with readers about some of the factors, both positive and negative, which may have a bearing on the congregational prayer meeting.

### Motives for attending

It is tempting for the minister, acting out of the best of motives, to implant in his fellowship a guilt complex about the prayer meeting. After all, the small numbers attending can be an immense discouragement to any pastor. He wonders, 'Don't these people believe in prayer? Don't they realise there is a devil against whose machinations we must pray? Don't they long to see God blessing our congregation? Then why don't they attend the prayer meeting?'

The pastor can allow his own desire to seek God's blessing on his church to percolate through into his preaching in an unhealthy way which results in guilt being aroused in some of his members regarding attendance at the prayer meeting. The last way of reviving an ailing

## Contents

- 1 Editorial
- 4 Could Mere Loving be a Life's Work?  
Peter White
- 9 Discipline in a Broad Church  
Norman Maciver
- 14 Our Father, Which Art in Heaven  
A Sermon by Bishop Hugh Latimer
- 18 Train the Child  
Annie Torrance
- 22 Grief and Grieving  
Bill Webster
- 26 Dimensions of Christ in Disney's The Lion King  
Marc Bircham
- 33 Ann Allen meets Alasdair I Macleod
- 37 Book Reviews

prayer gathering is to pressurise people into coming. Nothing is more likely to introduce the wrong spirit into the gathering. Unless those who come are there out of love for Christ and his church, the atmosphere will be reduced to that of the AGM of the local bowling club.

It is true that the pastor must sometimes have a ministry of exhortation. The Lord's people do need to be reminded of the greatest example of prayer—the praying Christ. They do need to be encouraged to join the church as it meets to pray. They also need to be challenged from time to time about their priorities. But always must they be pointed to Christ. Always must they be directed away from the shadow of the world's hand to the sunshine of God's presence. Those coming to pray who are there to meet

## *an oppressive heaviness hung like a dark cloud over the gathering....*

the Saviour, rather than being motivated by guilt, will be longing for the dark 'clouds of unknowing' to be swept away by the wind of the Spirit so that with open face they may glimpse his glory.

### **Prayer and pastoring**

A second problem with a prayer meeting—at least in its early years—lies with the pastor. He can remain apart in a little cocoon, with an invisible barrier between him and his people. Even sitting in the circle of the fellowship he can be 'apart' from the others, failing to relate to them. However, unless the pastor pastors his praying people, the prayer gathering will not flourish.

What has astonished me down the years is that some ministers apparently seem indifferent to the attendance of some of their people for prayer. Very often a mother may have hurried the tea and the children's homework to be there. Someone else may have rushed home from the office and even forgone an evening meal to attend. Quite apart from making such sacrifices one would

expect that those present would be warmly welcomed by their pastor and that he would want to let them know how good it to have them standing with him in the battle of prayer.

No one should leave the prayer meeting not having been spoken to. I know we go to pray and should have spoken to God. But the prayer gathering is (or should be) the very heart beat of Christ through the Spirit. From that heart-beat should flow loving care for each other.

Nevertheless, it is sadly true that many a shy member of the fellowship slips away unnoticed without having spoken to anyone. Surely it is the pastor's responsibility to ensure that never happens, least of all after a prayer meeting. I suspect that far more than many ever guess have gone home so hurt at being ignored they have not had the courage to come back.

### **The wrong kind of persistence**

Some old prayer-warriors hate a period of silence in the prayer meeting. I am not suggesting silences are to be encouraged, but when a proportion of those praying are very young Christians, silences can occur—unless, that is, there is a veteran 'pray-er' present. This kind of person does not help the prayer meeting at all. They love the sound of their own voice. Before the first, faltering, inarticulate prayer of a new Christian can be expressed, they plunge in, once, twice, a third, fourth, fifth and even sixth time, hogging the meeting. Indeed, they remind others present of the Lord's words about those who think they will be heard for their multiplicity of words!

Unless the pastor or leader has the courage, sensitivity and wisdom to enable these 'veterans' to exercise restraint and discernment, be sure the prayer meeting will be strangled near to death. The other side of the same coin is that unless encouragement and help is given new Christians to take part—perhaps, at first by writing out and reading a short prayer—they too will not return and will never become part of the church uniting in prayer. How important to assure them there is absolutely no need for prayer to be couched in AV language or

punctuated with quotations of texts and hymns.

### **The liturgical prayer meeting**

There is a fourth way of deadening a church's praying. It is a kind of liturgy which can imperceptibly develop among those who have attended for decades. The old faithfuls (I do not despise them for have not many of these great souls kept the prayer meeting alive during long years of spiritual drought?), may have a well-established pattern they unconsciously follow. But their prayers have become almost unthinking. They switch over to auto-pilot in their praying and cover ground without engaging their brains, using clichés such as 'journeying mercies', 'lying on beds of sickness' and 'those who know thee not'.

There may even be an unspoken order for both those who take part and the topics to be covered. Let some young believer, stammering his first words in open prayer, depart from that order or neglect those customary topics and a shocked silence suddenly fills the room until a veteran takes up the praying again and restores it to 'normality'! Heaven help us!

I recall my own mother saying of the pastor's announcement that 'the prayer meeting will take place next Tuesday as usual' that she was praying it would take place 'as unusual as possible' and that a new breath of the Spirit's life would sweep through those gathered bringing some radical changes!

### **Praying without targets**

My old homiletics teacher used to warn us against the kind of sermon in which the preacher jumps into the pool, splashes about for a while and then climbs out more or less where he jumped in. The same can be true of praying. The leader does need to help the fellowship to focus their praying clearly. He needs to give them targets. After all, praying is not unlike the gunfire of an artillery battery. What use for the gunners to load the ammunition, point their guns into the air and fire aimlessly at the middle distance.

On rare occasions such the Battle of Hastings in 1066 when King Harold was

killed by a stray arrow, battles have been won through aimless fire. But such incidents are the exceptions which prove the rule. Nonetheless, many prayer meetings languish because the topics are too vague and the prayers are so non-specific that they aim at nothing and hit it!

### **The unprepared room**

Through no fault of their own ministers can find it hard to be punctual. He is just about to leave for the mid-week meeting when the telephone goes. In spite of telling the caller he was just going through the front door, the person who phoned refuses to be brief. Ten minutes later, he dashes away, thoroughly hassled because he knows people will be waiting outside in the cold, the heat will not be on in the small hall, no hymn books will be out and the chairs will still be stacked up in a cupboard.

It is an enormous help to arrive each Wednesday evening fifteen minutes before the prayer meeting begins to find the hall open, the heat on, the chairs laid out and the hymn books ready. How fortunate is the fellowship which has some unseen helper who faithfully prepares the room each week for prayer. No minister who has to lead his people into God's presence should also have to double up as a doorkeeper. The right beginning for the prayer meeting is a prepared room with the lights on and a welcome that spells out the unspoken message that the prayer meeting really matters.

### **The unprepared pastor**

If there is to be singing, let the hymns be already chosen—with careful thought. If the prayer topics are printed, let them be available for the first to arrive. If the piano is to be used, let the pianist be in place, perhaps playing quietly a tune which evokes thoughts of God and his great grace. If someone else other than the pastor is to take part, let that person be present in plenty of time and already briefed about when and exactly how long they are to speak. No slipshod preparation. God's people are to enter the Holy of Holies through the offices of our great High Priest.

Any meditation should be appropriate. It is easy for the pastor to forget that possibly most of those attending have had a hectic and stressful day either at work or running the home. Long expositions before a prayer time are not the most helpful preparation. Far better a brief thought of less than five minutes duration which will direct people's minds to the urgency, privilege and grace of prayer. Let the pastor point them to Christ and to the energies of the Spirit. Or let him point them to the challenge of prayer, or the desperate need of those who are replying on the church's prayers. But let him above all lead them into an expectation of the divine presence and blessing and the desire of God to bless a faithful and obedient people.

### **Training in prayer**

Encourage focused prayers. My own people always seem to find it helpful to order their praying in terms of several concentric circles (as in Acts 1:8). We would begin at home (in 'Jerusalem') and pray first for the services on the Lord's Day, then for the life and work of the congregation in all its many aspects. Next we would move to a slightly wider circle ('Judea') of our immediate town or city with its neighbouring congregations and Christian witness. Then we would move to a yet wider circle ('Samaria') and pray for the nation. The widest circle ('the ends of the earth') took in our missionaries and the church of God throughout the world.

On one occasion, I came across an unexpected objection to this kind of focus for prayer. A very young Christian told me in no uncertain manner that she regarded me as a most selfish and unChristian man demanding people pray first for me—since I was leading both services on the Lord's Day. That taught me that alongside focused prayer there must also be an awareness of the battle in which we engage in prayer.

### **Awareness of the spiritual conflict**

Those who are establishing prayer gatherings in congregations whose members have never been taught to pray do need to teach that there is a spiritual battle

raging for the souls of men and women. That struggle intrudes into the conduct of worship as C.S. Lewis so graphically describes in his book *The Screwtape Letters*.

While Christ has defeated the devil and lead captivity captive, God's enemy and ours still rattles his chains and seeks to undermine in the most subtle of ways the life of God in the souls of men and women. Prayer is a most serious matter. As we pray, we engage the powers of darkness and we drive them back in Christ's name. By prayer we pluck 'brands from the burning'.

### **Ringling the changes**

A prayer meeting is a prayer meeting. God's people gather. They praise him. They consider his work and its needs.

*we engage the  
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They look to him through his word. Then they pray and prayer is nothing less than hard work! There are few changes than can be rung.

Nevertheless, the pastor must work at keeping the prayer meeting fresh. As well as through the three minutes word of exhortation and encouragement, freshness can also be achieved in the presentation of the prayer topics. A different voice reporting on some specific need can be helpful (though beware! stay in control and don't let someone run away with valuable prayer time by speaking for thirteen minutes instead of three!) The suggestion that someone leads in prayer for some specific need can also break the usual order without deflecting from the purpose of intercession.

Whatever changes are tried, avoid gimmicks and never lose sight of the target. Keep the artillery of prayer directed at specific needs and encourage those who pray by reporting back the answers to prayer God has graciously given.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

**Leadership in prayer**

Probably, some will disagree with me when I say that I am sure the minister should generally conduct the prayer meeting. True, when he is on holiday, let him encourage elders to take the lead—rather than close down the meeting down as if the minister were somehow indispensable, or as if prayer could be shelved for a week or two. But as with worship on the Lord's Day, so with prayer: there must be firm, loving leadership by word, example and inspiration.

There are many aspects of ministry which can and should be delegated. In the massive parish areas created these days by the church's central committees where the minister seems endlessly to be conducting funerals, he can carefully train an elder to fulfil this necessary witness of the congregation. In the youth work, especially where the age gap between him and teenagers has widened to the proportions of a vast chasm, let him allow those who understand today's young people take initiatives that would be beyond him. In the weary task of running the congregation let the church pay an administrator to free the pastor to pastor. But in the conduct of the church at prayer, the minister should yield to no

one, but be there on the front-line. Next to public worship, the prayer meeting must be a first priority.

**Our only recourse**

I recently listened to a presentation of the statistics for my own denomination in the city of Edinburgh and was again alarmed at the relentless, seemingly unending decline of the church! Perhaps even more alarming than the figures themselves was the total silence of the Presbytery in the face of the stark evidence of a dying church. The reaction was embarrassment. No one spoke. No one commented. It was as if someone had announced a member of the family was terminally ill and there was no doctor to help, no known cure.

The dearth of living, effective prayer meetings cannot but be inextricably bound up with the church's malaise. Badly run prayer meetings are little, if any, help. Therefore each congregation should look to the weekly hour of prayer. Members, elders and ministers must address with the utmost seriousness the place of the prayer meeting. For when the church of God unites in prayer, be sure that God will answer. Are not the prayers of God's people the decrees of God beginning to work?

# Could mere loving

## Could mere loving be a life's work? <sup>1</sup>

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).*

*Jesus looked at him and loved him (Mark 10:21).*

*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Acts 20:28).*

**T**he eager young pastor starts visiting his people, full of expectation that many a conversation will concern eternal matters; full of hope that he will be used each day as a catalyst in his members' meeting the Saviour. He knows that true love is mostly hard work and he is willing for that; but he did not anticipate the sheer reluctance to speak of spiritual things which he encounters as he visits. What, he asks himself, is pastoral care?

Pastoral care comes alive and stays alive when exercised theologically: when we remember what it is that we are doing. What distinctives does the pastor bring to his caring that make it genuinely pastoral during the long faithful spells?

## Pastoral care: its Christian assumptions

To recollect the ultimate, building block

truths which brought us to the pastorate is one handle on the 'dead routine' problem. There is, first, the reference point of our world view.

- God exists. He is the God with whom we and our members have to do day by day. We engage in our routine in company with the Godhead and as the incarnate expression of his compassion and purpose.

- The Word became flesh; the normality of Jesus' infancy and manhood are resources available to the situations we encounter.

- Men and women are made in the image of God; we are spiritual as well as physical and psychological beings. Although many may deny it, every cell in their bodies knows they were created for him and are sustained by him. In pastoral care we retain the confidence that this knowledge is there for us to appeal to.

- We are sinners. We can expect spiritual blindness to our assertions and moral resistance to our questions and our exploration of issues with people. We must reckon also on our own sinfulness intruding into our exercise of care.

- There is a difference between right and wrong and we have the Bible as a trustworthy directory to values.

- The church is God's family on earth; the fellowship and prayers of a caring church are vital resources unavailable anywhere else.

- Above all the pastor is distinguished by the resources of Spirit available to him. The carer walking close to Christ has in the Holy Spirit a unique wisdom and kindness. If we have prayed for a person and do not yet see evidence that our care is useful, we remember that the Holy Spirit loves the person more than we do. This does not let us off the responsibility to go on trying, but we should allow these facts to give us peace and hope when we see no visible benefit from our caring. While the secular carer looks either outside the person to therapeutic activities or inside them to self-acceptance, the pastor can look up to God for his Spirit's wisdom and working and for Christ's pardon and partnership.

Michael Taylor has suggested that the distinctives which Christianity brings to pastoral care can be summarised in the four words: formation, information, transformation and support. Faith is formative of our care in that Christ is steadily shaping us. It is informative in providing information to the caring process: the nature of man, the possibility of a new heart. It is transforming because a Christian is a distinctive person and because the Holy Spirit has unique power to change a person. It is supportive because of our world view; Taylor instances hope, sin and the Holy Spirit.

# be a life's work?

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The results, as Taylor points out, will not necessarily be distinctive. Our caring is Christian not because it always reaches different conclusions but because it has distinctive points of reference.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is, only the Christian carer is engaging with the whole of a person: a body-soul-in-community, with an eternal destiny. This is our confidence: we may expect to reach areas which no other carer can touch.

The pastor also has, in the end of the day, distinct aims. Our single-minded desire is to be able to say to our congregation what Paul wrote to Corinth: 'I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.' True pastors aim for this one outcome as what they most want to achieve in this life—the beauty of the Church, her family unity, her ethical purity, her enjoyment of God, her desire for his glory.

## **Pastoral care: its Christian values**

### **Knowing our people**

Good shepherds really work at knowing their people. Having had a seriously ill son for some years and observed attention good and not so good from the medical profession, I can testify that the doctors who have been any significant use have had a great interest and pleas-

ure in people, enthusiasm for their work and above-normal thoroughness in the performance of their tasks.

How important for pastors, the significance and difficulty of whose work is so much greater, to do at least as well. They will take an interest in each person, particularly watching out for change in people, keeping notes so as to remember the important things about them. They will build an information system to enable them to show care at special occasions such as the anniversary (especially the first) of bereavement.

### **Love for our people**

This second value lies behind my choice of the quotation from Elizabeth Goudge at the head of this article. Mary Montague, lame and in constant pain, would never marry; no other career was open to her. What should she do? Could mere loving be a life's 's work? She took a vow to love. Millions before her had done the same, but she was different: for she kept her vow, even after she had discovered its cost.

Until now she had only read her Bible as a pious exercise; now she read it as an engineer reads a blueprint and a traveller a map: with profound concentration, because her life depended on it. Slowly she discovered that Christ's love held and illumined every human being for whom she was con-

cerned. Slowly she discovered pain deepens love.<sup>3</sup> Mary Montague would never have dreamt it, but hers was precisely pastoral care.

The meaning of the Old Testament word translated 'to care' (Hebrew *darash*) is very significant. Its basic thought is to search, seek or enquire. Thus in Deuteronomy 11:12 the holy land is a land God cares for in the sense that he keeps a close eye on it with its welfare at heart. In Psalm 142:4 the Psalmist longs to have someone looking out for his soul or his life: the same idea of energetic interest based on the importance of the object of care for the carer. The issue in Jeremiah 23:4 is whether Jeremiah is seeking the 'shalom'—the overall health, harmony and well-being, spiritual and physical, of the people. Are we diligently seeking others' shalom?<sup>4</sup>

The New Testament words add a dimension for us. Paul and Timothy feel a concern for the church amounting to anxiety, especially for its future, so much so that if someone sins Paul burns in distress, and if they are weak, he feels weak (2Cor. 11:28f; Phil. 2:20).

The question for us to ask ourselves is whether we have our people so much on our hearts as to lead to care in action. Our Lord made the point in the story of the good Samaritan. Those who would care must do so in a thousand particulars. If we are not taking care of people, we do not care for them.

### **The kingdom of God**

This third foundational value is the saviourhood and reign of our Lord Jesus. It is remarkable that Ezekiel 34 writes so clearly of the centrality of Christ. Having berated the then leaders in Israel for caring only about themselves, God states his alternative:

I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend (literally, feed) them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them (Ezek.34:23f).

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It is clear good pastors are working that Christ shall be people's king and shepherd.

### **Pastoral care: its Christian task**

Ezekiel 34 is a very remarkable chapter. Quite apart from its curse on leaders who only take care of themselves it is an absolute window on the responsibilities from our side which open the door to 'showers of blessing' (v.26) from God's.

#### **Spiritual nourishment**

'I will raise up shepherds to look after them and feed them' (Jer.23:4). It cannot be emphasised too strongly that bringing the Scriptures to bear on living human situations is the primary task of pastoral care in biblical Christianity. This will be done primarily through authentic pulpit preaching, but also through every situation where the Word of God is introduced, explored and relevantly applied, for I define preaching, not institutionally, but functionally. In any situation where it is possible to explain

the Word of God and apply it, there is preaching. It may be formal preaching in a church service, or informal preaching as we gossip the gospel in a casual conversation.<sup>5</sup>

In both Old and New Testaments, the chief action of pastoring is such pasturing. A shepherd's first task is to provide food; both the literal and metaphorical usage of the key terms put this beyond dispute.<sup>6</sup> The word for shepherding in the Old Testament means, primarily, ensuring that domestic animals receive food (Gen.29:7). When used of God or his servants pastoring his people it is also used for feeding (Prov.15:14); the chief way in which the Lord is a good shepherd is that he feeds and provides for his people (Gen.48:15; Ps.23; Isa.40:11).

Good pastors ensure the people are fed (Ezek.34:14,26-31), and spiritual nourishment is the input of God's truth, for man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

The New Testament emphasis is even stronger. The person who enters by way of Jesus the good shepherd will find pasture (Jn.10:9). The 'sheep' are fed as they listen to Jesus' voice (Jn.10:16). Similarly Peter's task after the resurrection would be to ensure that the lambs and sheep were fed (Jn.21:15ff).

Paul's model of pastoring is primarily nourishment of the spiritual life by the process of conveying the gospel and its implications. He uses words like preach, teach, declare, testify, proclaim and warn (Acts 20:20ff). The description of good pastoring as consisting above all of sound, healthy teaching is thus underlined. That which builds up God's flock is the 'message of his grace' (Acts 20:32). By contrast, enemies of the gospel provide bad food when they distort the truth (Acts 20:30).

William Still is but reflecting the genius and emphasis of holy scripture, therefore, when he writes:

Look at it like this. The Christian life is Christ in us. Christ is revealed 'in all the scriptures' (Luke 24:27). We can only learn him there, and become transformed into his image through feeding on His Word.

All that many sick people need is a good and balanced diet and a disciplined routine. My principal surgery, clinic, visiting hour, committee room, call it what you will, is the pulpit and teaching desk.

It is through the ministry of the whole Word, every part of it—e.g. I think of the inestimable value of some studies in the book of Proverbs which proved to be an eye-opener as far as the practical details of daily living are concerned—it is through that ministry that men and women are made and, when they resist it, are marred.

It is that ministry which makes Christian character so that healthy feeders need the pastor less and less.<sup>7</sup>

The first task in pastoral care is to gain an entrance for the Word of God into people's lives just as the shepherd's first task is to lead the sheep to pasture. Most of us are not as good at this, I suspect, as we should be. Faced with a practical problem in someone's life we are (for the most part) excellent listeners; but the wit and courage to bring scriptural teaching to bear on it is our distinctive calling.

### **Gathering and keeping the flock together**

God complained to the leaders of his people in Ezekiel's day, 'You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost' (Ezek.34:4). Jesus is especially committed to be present where his people gather together (Mt.18:19f), and some of God's most terrible condemnations are for pastors who allow his flock to be scattered or fail to major on gathering it together.<sup>8</sup>

This second task of pastoral care is to nourish a sense of the church, especially at worship, as the heartfelt desire and priority of every Christian. It is also to encourage responsible, accountable and sacrificial commitment to the life of the congregation as the life and gifts of each member allow. We shall encourage members to notice who is not there and to enquire after them if the absence is repeated. We shall take every opportu-

nity to foster a spirit of family under God's fatherhood as the most important truth in our members' lives—for such it is.

### Protecting the sheep

What is the spiritual equivalent of a shepherd guarding his sheep against wild animals? It is not just that in time of persecution or plague the Christian leader should be active in protecting his people physically. Peace with God loses us peace with the world, the flesh and the devil. These dangers to our salvation call the minister to protective skill of a special order.

Alastair Campbell is surely right in drawing attention to the courage called for in this kind of care.<sup>9</sup> To speak about the dangers that the world and the flesh introduce into people's lives, calls for resolution as well as love. How often does the pastor 'rebuke with all authority' (Tit. 2:15)? The pastor who would take action to protect his member from the pull of the world, the flesh and the devil risks the relationship.

Some examples of such protection can be suggested. In respect of the world, the desire to 'get on and better oneself' is good but it can be self-centred, drawing one away from God and from true quality of life. Job security can subtly take over from Jesus as one's first love and lead a person, sadly, to miss all that matters most.<sup>10</sup>

What of the 'flesh'? Self-will and over-reaction when it is crossed, self-indulgence, lust, covetousness, any habit or hobby which ends up taking a person over—these can prove bitter enemies to our faith. Dangers from the devil include hindrances and sudden unreasonable accusations on one's conscience. How much a pastor can do for people if he trains them to recognise and resist these devices!

Another vital area for protection is in the realm of truth. As Gregory of Nazianzus observed, people 'would sacrifice anything rather than their private convictions'.<sup>11</sup> Paul spoke of false teachers as 'savage wolves not sparing the flock'. Clearly their influence was a danger to the church. Truth really does matter and the dangers of error are real.

In fact, Paul's command 'be on your guard' means literally to stay awake and he set the pattern to follow: 'I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears' (Acts 20:31).

We may not abdicate our responsibility to protect folk from spiritual danger. When to speak and when to pray and wait is a judgement that calls for wisdom. Well might we covet Isaiah's gift: 'The Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary' (Isa. 50:4).

### Healing

God complains to the leaders in Ezekiel's day, 'You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured' (Ezek. 34:4). The good leader will defend the afflicted and save the children of the needy (Ps. 72:4; cf. Isa. 42:2f). A distinctive of pastoral care is that it follows up distress with practical mercy.<sup>12</sup>

Just as a diligent shepherd examines every sheep after dipping and shearing, the Christian pastor approaches conversation sensitive to grief and guilt. By hospitable greeting and warm enquiry we must make it clear how very interested we are.

None of us is whole. We must learn how to deal with different types of diseases: arguably, more firmly with men than women, and with the rich than the poor. We must be unembarrassed to put down the cocky while gently showing the crushed and faint-hearted the good in themselves.<sup>13</sup> Guilt and guilt feelings are very painful; happy the congregation whose pastor heals and builds faith. 'The aim is to help people see what the Lord is saying to them,' says Still.<sup>14</sup>

### Leadership

A spiritual shepherd 'leads them out. When he has brought out all his own he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him' (Jn. 10:3f). The responsibility to include leading as part of pastoral care is present whenever scripture covers the subject.<sup>15</sup>

The pastor gives a lead whether he likes it or not. The mind-set and progress of a congregation is more influenced by the leadership team than by any other

single factor. If the pastoral leader trusts the awesome potential of the preached Word; if only the best will do in everything; if his conversations have the character of faithful witness and his relationships breathe esteem of and interest in others; if he has made a wise audit of the congregation's state and is developing a strategy for its progress; if he treads down unbelief and looks to God for the reaping from such sowing, these things cannot but breed a spirit within the congregation.

Even not to give a lead, gives a lead, for a church's life is dynamically affected by the approach of the leaders. Let us seek advice and support, therefore, so

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that each person is playing to his strengths.

### Pastoral care: its Christian methods

Pastoral situations are so varied, we often wonder how best to respond to different problems. In a fascinating study Derek Tidball has identified pastoral methods implicit in the different sections of Scripture and proposes that we select from them as appropriate in our own work.<sup>16</sup>

Matthew's special distinctive, says Tidball, is the direct way in which he takes the teaching of Jesus and uses it to address the problems of the church of his day. Well, let us boldly do the same. His special concerns are discipleship—notably obedience to God's law and open profession of Christ—and the



Christian community, especially its brotherly care and the discipline needed to maintain it.

Mark, written during a time of persecution, points to Jesus' compassion and to his example in experiencing and enduring suffering. He shows a very human Jesus who nonetheless had identified his calling and refused to be deflected from it; who, through trusting the authority of God, continued faithful amidst assault and suffering. As we are repeatedly called into the mystery of suffering there are times for following Mark's example in turning people's attention to a Jesus who knows their experience from within.

Luke's pastoral method, suggests Tidball, is story-telling. Rather than preach at his readers, in Acts he gives an orderly account of (for example) how, every time the church came to a crisis and things seemed hopeless, the result was a new advance. He lets the history speak for itself, including the place of prayer in receiving God's Spirit and as a factor in the church's forward progress.

To a church torn by different understandings of Christ during a time of persecution, John's pastoral method is to fix their gaze on Christ: fully human, genuinely God, all-sufficient, self-giving, highly exalted and now the very centre of heavenly worship.

Paul's pastoral method is in essence two-fold. There is first, as the Christian experience of thousands would testify, immense pastoral power in the way he links his teaching of the gospel with the explication of its behavioural implications. Secondly, he is himself an example, whenever possible providing a positive and appreciative climate for his teaching, very open about his own experience and needs and always concerned to enable Christians to work things through for themselves.

Thus a study of the New Testament writers' pastoral methods provides tools for us to choose from in different contexts. One time, to tell a story; another, to show the bearing of Jesus' teaching on an ethical problem. It aims to present people mature in Christ, to Christ, as a pure bride for her husband. Its primary task is unambiguously to bring the Word

of God to bear on the lives of people in Christian community.

Integral to such caring is a diligent, living knowledge of our people flowing from a burdened concern for their shalom, their rounded well-being. Who is sufficient for these things? The conscientious pastor (there is no other sort) will cast himself helpless, yet hopeful, on God whose love and care he longs adequately to express.

An exercise. Take ten minutes today to consider, and record your response to, the following questions:

- Are there any steps I could be taking to know and love my people better?
- Can I do anything differently to enhance this church's experience of the gracious reign of Christ?
- Is the effect of my influence to nourish, gather, protect, heal and lead in a genuinely Christian way?
- Am I honestly, expectantly depending on the Holy Spirit to be the effective pastor for Christ here?

### Endnotes

- 1 E. Goudge, *The Dean's Watch*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1960, p.113.
- 2 M. Taylor, *Learning to Care*, London, SPCK, 1983, p.19-37.
- 3 E. Goudge, op. cit., p.113-116.
- 4 C.P. White, 'The Church: A Caring Community', in *Scottish Tyndale Bulletin*, 1977, p.48-63, spells out the Old and New Testament words and their implications.
- 5 See J.I. Packer, *Aspects of Authority*, Orthos Papers, no. 9, Disley, Cheshire, n.d., p.13.
- 6 E.g. R. Harris et al, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1980, on ra'ah (vol.2, p.852f)
- 7 W. Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, Aberdeen, Gilcomston South Church, 1976, pp.18,19.
- 8 See, for example, Jer.23:1-4; Acts 20:29-31; Heb.10:25; 12:22-29.
- 9 A.V. Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*, London, SCM, 1986, pp. 33-36.
- 10 As with Demas: 2Tim.4:10.
- 11 Gregory of Naziansus, *Oration 2*,

Section 40; NPNF, second series, volume 7, p.213.

12 B.B. Warfield, 'The Emotional Life of our Lord', *The Person and Work of Christ*, PRPC, 1950, p.93-145.

13 Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule*, Book II, in NPNF, 2nd series, vol.12, spells out such considerations in great detail. They are also explored in Gregory of Naziansus: *Oration 2*, NPNF, 2nd series, vol.7, pp.204ff.

14 W. Still, *Dying to Live*, Fearn, Christian Focus Publications, 1991, p.111.

15 E.g., Ezek.34; Jn.10; Acts 20:17-38; 1Pet.5:1-5.

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# Discipline in a Broad Church

Norman Maciver, Newhills, Aberdeen

I want to consider the practice of discipline in a so-called 'broad church', because I feel this is a crucial need within contemporary historic denominations. We should attempt first to define the term 'broad'. Clearly this will very much depend on one's theological position since the term 'broad' has been used primarily with respect to theology. Since our theology is determined by our view of Scripture, a broad church is one that embraces a variety of attitudes to the interpretation of Scripture as it applies to the central ethical and ecclesiastical issues of our time.

Second, here is a working definition of 'discipline' and its purposes: 'Discipline was concerned with disciplining individuals with the repression of vice and the nourishment of virtue, whilst sustaining the fellowship of the true church and restoring repentant sinners with the structuring and maintenance of society at large as a "Godly community". This tended towards legalism and was highly judgmental. But in theory, at least, there was a strong affirmation of forgiveness and of the availability of absolution of the repentant sinner.'<sup>1</sup>

## Cultural Background

I myself was nurtured in the Church of Scotland, though never a member of an evangelical congregation during my teenage and adult years. As a boy of six, having been born and begun my education in Glasgow, my family settled in

Lewis. Four years later my father died so a year later we returned to Glasgow. For five formative years of my life, I was part of a unique culture and church which although Church of Scotland, was influenced by the dominant Free Church culture of the island. Broad the Church of Scotland may be, but not in my early experience and growing awareness! In Lewis, the Church of Scotland appeared to me to fall into line with the ethos of the Free Church. At the very least, this meant strict Sabbatarianism, a high societal response to public worship, and the reservation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the converted elect. There was, however, a rather undisciplined attitude to baptism.

## Revival

During my years in Lewis, revival broke out under the preaching of Duncan Campbell. In a short time the revival undermined the strict rule-bound discipline of an increasingly nervous church leadership. There were new converts, many of them young people who were infiltrating the staid prayer meetings. There was talk of the exercise of the charismata, and some rather unusual behaviour in church services under the unction of the Holy Spirit. To a boy, the changes were exciting and attractive. All too soon however the wave passed, 'normality' returned and the church scene was in no great measure any different from before. Please remember I was us

ing spectacles which were theologically naive and culturally bound.

It is now forty-six years since I left my island home and I confess have not entirely shed my island prejudices. It will be evident, therefore, that in dealing with 'discipline in the broad church' I come to it with a cultural background that I have struggled to re-evaluate and even dismantle. But then are we not all in the same boat, to some extent at least?

## Authority under attack

As we consider church discipline, in whatever context, we must root our thinking in Scripture. Discipline has to do with authority so it is no accident that the command to the apostles to go into all the world to make disciples ('discipled ones') is firmly grounded in the Lord's claims that 'all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations' (Mt.28:18f). While committed Christians would want to submit gladly to Christ's authority, we need to recognise that we do live in a society where every kind of authority is increasingly under attack and subject to negative criticism. Inevitably there follows a dissipation of discipline and the consequent danger of rampant anarchy.

The church must again begin to clarify its thinking and so in a relevant and informed way seek to offer guidance to both, to its members and to wider society.

Bible teachers have always had the difficult task of proclaiming unchanging truths of divine revelation in the thought forms of any given culture in a way that corrects, guides and enriches. Yet those entrusted with the Gospel must avoid the ever-present danger of too close an identity resulting in objective biblical truth being swallowed up in the fleeting, relativistic values of the age.

## Biblical Base

Two basic Hebrew roots are used for discipline: *yasar* and *limmud*. The former has several meanings such as chastise, discipline, rebuke, teach, train and advise, which in English carry many different nuances. The latter has notions of learning, teaching and on occasions, 'being tamed'. The way in which these words are translated in the AV and NIV indicates different emphases which clearly reflect developing societal understandings of 'discipline'. In some passages in the AV, *limmud* is translated 'chastening' (Job 5:11; Ps. 94:12), whereas in NIV it has been translated 'disciplining'. In common English usage 'chasten' suggests 'correction by suffering'. Indeed one dictionary definition gives 'chasten' the meaning of 'subjection'.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the word 'discipline' has a more positive note of training for moral health or a system of rules for conduct of life.

In the NT the two main Greek words are *paideuo* and *matheteuo*/*mathetes*, which carry the same variety of nuances as the corresponding Hebrew words. *Mathetes* tightly corresponds to the concept of discipleship with experiences of 'learning' and 'following' prevalent in its use. In *paideuo* concepts of 'instruction' and 'training' are introduced but also 'correction' and 'rebuke'. In the NT, a disciple (*mathetes*) is one who is a 'pupil of a teacher' and so under his authority; 'the earthly disciples of Jesus formed the nucleus of the church and the pattern of the relation-

ship between Jesus and His earthly disciples was constitutive for the relationship between the risen Lord and the members of His Church'.<sup>3</sup>

However, when we look at the history of our church in Scotland, we find the common use of the word 'chasten' in the 17th century had negative overtones of punishment and retribution whereas, moving into the late 20th century the word discipline is much more germane to positive notions of correction and restoration.

## New Testament practice

The focus and purpose of discipline from the time of Jesus through the NT church was clearly one of restoration to full fellowship with believers.

### Jesus

The paradigmatic passage is Matthew 18:15-20 where Jesus settles both the process in the case of sin within the church family and the goal of such a process. As the process moves from 'one-to-one' attempts to resolve the issue to two further opportunities with two or three witnesses and then the whole church, it is clear the goal is to restore fullness of fellowship on the basis of absolute forgiveness (Mt. 18:21f). If all else fails, says Jesus, then excommunication is the ultimate consequence (v.17) but, even here, we must not forget the teaching of the next Matthean pericope: forgiveness and restoration remain the goals of church discipline.

There is implicit recognition here that the church of Jesus Christ, 'the disciplined ones', are not the fully sanctified ones. There remains the distinct expectation of sin amongst believers, and Jesus is indicating an unambiguous method of dealing with it. In other words, the expectation of Jesus is that, in one sense, his Church will never be the narrow

church of the sinless but always the broad church of the forgiven sinner, still with the proclivity towards sin.

### Paul

This is certainly the church we find in Paul's pastoring much of whose letter writing was to churches with problems in relationships, in worship, at the Lord's Table, in family life, at work and not least in areas of personal morality. Paul's intention is always to see breaches healed and sinners restored to full fellowship. Seldom is the apostle more severe in his exercise of discipline than when dealing with sexual scandal in the church. Paul's judgement on the man guilty of incest must be his most extreme: 'hand this man over to Satan' (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Note this has to be done in the context of worship—when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus' and when there is a sense of 'the power of our Lord Jesus present'. In this act of corporate church discipline, the intention is the restoration and salvation of the sinful man, 'so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord'.

## The Reformation

We come to the exercise of discipline in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation onwards. With the establishment of the Reformed Church John Knox published The First Book of Discipline in 1560. This historic work contained an explicit statement on ecclesiastical discipline. At first Parliament refused to ratify the book because of its liberal provision for education. Nonetheless its regulations were loyally followed in the parishes. Indeed, as early as 1558 in Dundee and other places, elders had been appointed whose primary function was the exercise of church discipline and to these elders the 'whole brethren promised allegiance'.<sup>4</sup>

Ten years later in 1568 'the Kirk Session of Aberdeen ordered a mutual trial and examination of the minister, elders, deacons and reader four times a year and then before each communion, trial by the whole church'.<sup>5</sup> The Book of Discipline is written in the understanding

**'chasten' in the 17th century had negative overtones of punishment**

there is a dividing line in practical Christian living between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and 'the jurisdiction given to the eldership has to take cognisance, only of personal behaviour of church members which brings slander upon the church'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we get the essential connection again between authority and discipline.

A great deal of work was then done to establish clear biblical doctrine to be presented before Parliament which was 'wholesome, true and only necessary to be believed and to be received within that realm',<sup>7</sup> and in just four days the Scots Confession was produced. Thus disciplinary priorities were being developed for ecclesiastical order, ordained ministers, elders and members. The thrust of Knox's goal in the exercise of discipline was that the church ought not to be more severe than God who forgives the penitent sinner.

### **Marks of the church**

Knox went on to develop certain marks by which we can recognise the true as distinct from the false church. 'Where there is true preaching of the Word of God, right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus which must be annexed to the Word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts' and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered as 'God's Word prescribes... there is the true Church of Christ not the universal but the particular Church such as was in Corinth'.<sup>8</sup>

Knox made it clear that discipline is of the very essence of the church and further defined the goal of discipline as seeking rather to win a brother than to slander him. Thus he encouraged watchful firmness with patient consideration in accordance with the NT pattern. Alas, discipline degenerated for some three centuries and there were often instances of crude practices—including the stool of repentance—which edified no one.

### **The Church today**

Theoretically, discipline still applies in churches today. But what exactly is true preaching of the word of God and how do we recognise the right administra-

tion of the sacraments of Jesus Christ? What assurance have we that ecclesiastical discipline is being administered according to the NT pattern? Such questions lead us into the minefield of church practice in today's Church of Scotland, a church that proudly proclaims itself 'a broad church'.

### **Conscience clause**

Ninety years after The Book of Discipline came the Westminster Confession of Faith. There is no reason to suppose that the documents of the Westminster Assembly made any appreciable difference to the church's pastoral discipline. However the Confession did become a source of growing disharmony resulting in much of today's Presbyterian divide in Scotland. Whereas, the national church later wrote into its ordination standards a 'conscience clause', some Presbyterian denominations (Free Church of Scotland, Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and more recently the Associated Presbyterian Church), adhere strictly to the Confession.

While it may have been liberating in various ways for the national church to have in its ordination vows the clause 'allowing liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the faith', the thorn in the flesh of orderly church life today is that nobody over the years has been able to grasp the nettle of defining the 'substance of the faith'. Therefore effectively the Church of Scotland is in danger of having no authority against which to measure proper and improper behaviour.

### **Crisis of truth and discipline**

The Word of God 'contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament' is still the national church's 'supreme rule of faith and life', but even here we face a wording that is capable of opening the flood gates of indiscipline. Who defines where and how the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments 'contain' the Word of God? Appeal may be made to the Kirk's Articles Declaratory priorities of accepted doctrine; there are the historic Christian Creeds; but still clarity evades us. There is no agreement on major ethical and doctri-

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nal problems and at this moment in our history, the Church of Scotland is a 'broad church' sitting on, at best, unsure and shaky foundations.

By appeal to the 'conscience clause', the Westminster Confession of Faith, our subordinate standard, is largely ignored in terms of the Virgin Birth, Christ's bodily resurrection or his second coming. Efforts to write a new Confession fail because of the wide spectrum of theological conviction within our membership. Even appeals to Scripture, our supreme rule of faith and life, falter on the grounds of disagreement as to what is the Word of God contained in the Scriptures. So the Church of Scotland faces a crisis of theological truth and therefore ecclesiastical discipline.

At the recent World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Brazil were delegates from churches which were comfortable with the Lausanne Covenant; there were also those who were in the vanguard of religious syncretism, universalism and moral relativism. There were yet others from Eastern Orthodox Churches absolutely opposed to any idea of the acceptability of an active homosexual lifestyle. But yet other delegates regarded such a lifestyle as wholly acceptable. These widely differing views all appealed to Scripture as their final supportive authority. Where can there be any objective common ground for the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline?

#### **A dynamic Jesus**

It is only fair I admit that for all its benefits, my Calvinistic West Highland background taught me that everything was to be seen in terms of black and white, true and false. The assumption was that the Bible unequivocally revealed what was on one side of the truth divide and what was on the other. However, I now find my head wrestles with, and my heart loves, a dynamic, living, much bigger Jesus than I ever came to know in those childhood days.

In no way would I be dismissive of the great strengths of my background but I have had to learn not to stagnate and to understand that I am far from being fully sanctified! So as a minister in a

broad church I struggle as I witness the virtual disappearance of any final authority for the exercise of biblical discipline.

#### **Heresy**

At this point, I need to deal with some specific examples and questions. A century ago two of the church's finest scholars, Dr Robertson Smith and John McLeod Campbell, were charged with heresy, found guilty and excommunicated. Who today would dare bring a charge of doctrinal heresy against any minister of the Church of Scotland whatever his theological deviations? Indeed, a minister may deny the virgin birth, the resurrection and the need of atonement for sin with apparent impunity, yet another minister be forced to resign from his charge for standing by personal convictions regarding biblical principles on the ordination of women. Such is the enigmatic situation of discipline in the broad church today.

#### **Baptism**

Consider the practice of baptism. In many congregations, children are baptised without any evidence of parental commitment to Christ. Nor is any preparation offered prior to the child's baptism? Indeed I understand that in the administration of baptism, some ministers do not even ask the participating parents for a vow of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Other ministers find themselves in great trouble because they abide by the Church's law that normally one parent should be in membership before baptism is administered.

Inherent within this 'broad' spectrum of sacramental practice are considerable problems in that all too often those who seek to honour the Church's law on baptism find their position seriously undermined when a colleague in the next parish flouts that law by offering baptism to anyone irrespective of church allegiance. Try raising this in the Presbytery to experience the most nervous of silences! To grasp the sheer incongruity of this, note that baptism is the only area of doctrine and practice the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has identified as of 'the substance of the faith'.

### Church membership

Membership is now on a very slippery slope. When I entered the ministry over twenty years ago, my Kirk Session annually examined the roll of members to see who had or who had not been active in their attendance. Their expectation was attendance at one communion service during the previous two years. The General Assembly required attendance at communion be carefully recorded. Nationally those communicating annually has fallen to less than 60%. In my own congregation we offered specific personal counsel to defaulters as we sought to evoke the Biblical principle of restoration and correction. Where that failed then the Supplementary Roll came into play, not to abandon confused members but to help to continue to visit, pastor and encourage.

In 1992 the General Assembly abolished the requirement for Communion statistics. Was this simply to make life easier for busy Session Clerks or was it to hide the embarrassment of the real weakness of the church? It has made basic discipline in the local congregation much more difficult.

### Conclusion

We have travelled quickly from Scripture, through our history, to current disciplinary practice—more often the lack of it—within the broad Church of Scotland as it is at the close of the 20th century. I have sought to air my own concerns regarding some of the issues we face in parish ministry. Of course, there is always the option of seceding into a gathered church of like-minded where we could write our own foundational codes and erect them as barriers at our gates. However for me that would be to act in disobedience to the Master. My understanding of the Church's history is that the only secessions blessed by God have been those that sought to reform the Church from within until they were effectively excluded.

I am aware some issue may arise in the not too distant future that will force me personally to face hard questions.

One in particular occurs to me: it is the possibility of our church equivocating on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of all creation. As John Stott once said of him, he has 'no rivals, no peers and no successors'. However, until that day comes, here in the church to which God has called me I must contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. I am but a flawed servant in a flawed church, struggling to discern more of the wonder of his truth and to fulfil his great commission.

At times the church is in danger of being so broad as to be utterly indistinguishable from a sin-laden culture. Yet for this church and culture Jesus Christ gave his life. He subjected himself to the supreme discipline of the cross, abandoned by those whom today we venerate as founders and pillars of the church.

In these days of new national reawakening, the fight is on for the soul of Scotland. I dare to believe that the 'broad' Church of Scotland, still in the hands of Almighty God, has a unique part to play both in shaping the culture of the twenty-first century and in fulfilling God's purposes. However, it will only do so as those from both ends of our theological breadth struggle honestly together to discern the interpretation of God's Word for Scotland today.

One cannot fail to observe the temptation of some to fashion a church that is broad only at their end of the spectrum and is therefore by definition both narrow and intolerant. For myself I long to contribute whatever I can from my experience and conviction so that we can be brought back to a gracious and positive discipline that takes seriously the NT thrust of forgiveness, restoration and training in godliness. This can only be done in the context of an invigorating creative breadth where we listen to each other openly with genuine Christian love and respect.

*here in the church to  
which God has called  
me I must contend for  
the faith*

### Endnotes

- 1 *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, ed. A.V. Campbell, SPCK, 1987, article by Professor Duncan Forrester p. 72
- 2 *Fowler's Concise English Dictionary*, Wordsworth 1989.
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- 4 *A Church History of Scotland*, J.H.S. Burleigh, OUP, 1960 p.143
- 5 John T. McNeill *The History of the Cure of Souls*, SCM, 1952, p.249
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- 8 *Idem*. p.156

# Our Father, which art in heaven (Mt. 6:9)

## A sermon by Bishop Hugh Latimer preached in 1552

I have spoken of late many things of prayer. For I think there is nothing more necessary to be spoken of, nor more abused by the craft and subtilty of the devil than prayer. Many things are taken for prayer when they are not prayer at all. Therefore I have thought it good to entreat of prayer to the intent that it might be known how precious a thing right prayer is.

The prayer of our Lord may be called a prayer above all prayers, the principal and most perfect prayer, considering that our Saviour himself is the author of it. For it must needs be perfect, good, and of great importance, being our Saviour's teaching, which is the wisdom of God itself. In this discourse we consider only the saluation or a Loving Entrance: 'Our Father which art in heaven.'

### 1. 'Our Father'

These words are an entering, a seeking favour, at God's hand. Yet if we weigh well and consider them, they admonish us of many things and strengthen our faith. For this word 'Father' signifies that we are Christ's brothers, and that God is our Father. He is the eldest Son: he is the Son of God by nature, we are his Father's children by adoption through his goodness; therefore he bids us call him our Father.

Here we are admonished how we are reconciled unto God. We, who before-

times were his enemies, are made now the children of God, and inheritors of everlasting life. So that 'Father' is a word of much importance, for it confirms our faith when we call him Father. Therefore our Saviour here teaches us to understand the fatherly affection which God bears towards us. Wherefore we are bold to call upon him, knowing that he bears a good-will towards us, and that he will surely hear our prayers.

When we are in trouble we doubt whether a stranger will help us. But our Saviour commanding us to call God 'Father' teaches us to be assured of the love and good-will of God toward us. So by this word 'Father' we learn to establish and strengthen our faith. For Christ was a perfect schoolmaster: he lacked no wisdom: he knew his Father's will and pleasure; he teaches us, and most certainly assures us, that God will be no cruel judge, but a loving Father.

### Praying with understanding

Seeing now that we find such commodities by this one word, we ought to consider the whole prayer with great diligence and earnest mind. It is to no purpose to speak the words without understanding. That would be but lip-labour and vain babbling, and so unworthy to be called prayer. This was common in times past in our land. Therefore when you say this prayer, you must well consider what you say. For it

is better once said deliberately with understanding, than a thousand times without understanding.

Here you must understand that as our Saviour was most earnest and fervent in teaching us how to pray and to call upon God for help and for things necessary both to our souls and bodies; so the devil, that old serpent, with no less diligence endeavours himself to stop our prayers, so that we will not call upon God. Amongst his devices he has one especially wherewith he thinks to keep us from prayer, which is, the remembrance of our sins.

### Temptation not to pray

When he perceives us to be disposed to pray, he comes with his craft and subtle conveyances, saying, 'What! will you pray unto God for help? Do you not know that you are a wicked sinner, a transgressor of the law of God? Expect rather to be damned, and judged for your ill doings, than to receive any benefit at his hands. Will you call so holy a God "Father", when you are so miserable a sinner?' This the devil will say, and trouble our minds, so to give us occasion not to pray unto God.

In this temptation we must seek for some remedy and succour. The remedy for this temptation is to call our Saviour to remembrance, who has taught us to say this prayer. He knew his Father's pleasure. When he commanded us to

call God our Father, he knew we should find fatherly affections in God towards us.

Remember too that our Saviour has cleansed through his passion all our sins, and taken away all our wickedness so that as many as believe in him shall be the children of God. Thus let us fight against the temptations of the devil not to call upon God, because we be sinners. Catch hold of your Saviour, believe in him and be assured in your heart that he with his suffering took away all your sins. Therefore, though our sins condemn us, yet when we allege Christ and believe in him, our sins shall not hurt us. For John says, 'We have an advocate with God the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'.

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### One Advocate

Mark that he says 'advocate'. He uses singular, not plural. We have one Advocate, not many; neither saints, nor any body else, but only him and none other, neither by the way of mediation, nor by the way of redemption. He only is sufficient, for he only is all the Doer. Let him have the whole praise! Let us not withdraw from him his majesty, and give it to others: for he only satisfies for the

sins of the whole world; so that all that believe in Christ be clean from all the filthiness of their sins.

Does the devil call you from prayer? Christ calls you unto it again! for so it is written, 'To that end the Son of God appeared, to destroy the works of the devil'.

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### A great high Priest

It is a wonderful saying of John Baptist, 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world'. The devil says unto me, 'You are a sinner.' 'No!' says John, 'the Lamb of God has taken away your sins.' 'We therefore having a great high Priest, which has passed through the heavens, even Jesus the Son of God, let us with boldness go unto the seat of his grace, that we may obtain mercy.' Isaiah says, 'The pain of our punishment was laid upon him, and with his stripes are we healed.'

Now you see how you be remedied from your sins. You hear how you shall withstand the devil, when he will withdraw you from prayer. Let us therefore not give up prayer, but stick unto it. Let us rather believe Christ our Saviour than the devil who was a liar from the beginning. You know now how you may

prevent him, how you may put him off and avoid his temptations.

## 2. Which art in heaven

There is one other point in this loving entrance, which much confirms and increases our faith: He says, 'which art in heaven'. These great words make a difference between the heavenly Father, and our earthly fathers. There be some earthly fathers which would fain help their children, but they cannot; they be not able to help them. Again, there be some earthly fathers which are rich, and might help their children, but they be so unnatural, they will not help them. But we learn our heavenly Father will help for he bears a fatherly love towards us.

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### In heaven

Here we learn that he is able to help us, to give us all good things necessary to soul and body. He is mighty to defend us from all ill and peril. So it is clear that he is a Father who, being celestial, is able to help us. Therefore we may have boldness and confidence he will help us where and whensoever we call. He says, 'I fill heaven and earth.' Again, 'Heaven



is my seat, and the earth is my footstool.' Here we see that he is a mighty God in heaven and earth, with his power and might.

On earth he is not so apparently, but darkly and obscurely he exhibiteth himself unto us; for our corrupt and feeble natures could not bear his majesty. Yet he fills the earth, ruling and governing it, ordering all things according unto his will and pleasure. Therefore we must learn undoubtingly to believe that he is able to help and bears a good and fatherly will towards us, nor will he forget us.

He is here on earth very darkly; but he is in heaven most manifestly where he shows himself unto his angels and saints face to face. We read in scripture that Abel's blood did cry unto God in

*catch hold of your  
Saviour...be assured  
in your hearts that he  
took away all your  
sins*

heaven where he can hear, yea, not only hear, but also see, and feel. For he sees over all things, so that the least thought of our hearts is not hid from him. Therefore ponder these words well, for they fortify our faith.

#### **Confidence**

Further, this word 'Father' also moves God to hear us, when we call him by that name 'Father'. When he perceives our confidence in him, he shows himself to be Father. So that this word is most meet to move God to pity and to grant our requests. Certain it is, and proved by holy scripture, that God has a fatherly and loving affection towards us, far passing the love of bodily parents to their children. Yea, as far as heaven and earth is asunder, so far his love towards mankind exceeds the love of natural parents to their children: 'Can a wife forget

the child of her womb, and the son whom she hath borne? Though she do forget him, yet will I not forget thee.' Here is shown the unspeakable love which God bears towards us.

It is a very unnatural woman that hates or neglects her child. Truth it is, there be some women very unnatural and unkind, which shall receive their punishments of God for it; but for all that, we ought to beware and not to believe every tale told unto us, and so rashly judge. Here I have occasion to tell you a story which happened at Cambridge. Master Bilney who suffered death for God's word sake was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge [of Christ]. I thank him, next to God, for that knowledge that I now have in the word of God. I was as obstinate as any was in this land, insomuch that when I should be made Bachelor of Divinity, my whole oration went against Philip Melancthon and his opinions. Bilney heard me at that time, and perceived that I was zealous without knowledge. He came to me afterward in my study, and desired me, for God's sake, to hear his confession. I did so and I learned from him more than in many years. From that time forward I began to taste the word of God, and forsook the school-doctors.

#### **A woman falsely accused**

Now, after I had been acquainted with him, I went with him to visit the prisoners in the tower at Cambridge; for he was ever visiting prisoners and sick folk. Together we exhorted them as well as we were able to do; moving them to patience, and to acknowledge their faults. Among other prisoners, there was a woman which was accused of killing her own child, which act she plainly and stedfastly denied, and could not be brought to confess. At the length after diligent enquiry we found her husband loved her not; therefore he sought means to make her out of the way.

The matter was thus: a child of hers had been sick and decayed for the space of a year. At length it died in harvest-time. She went to her neighbours for help to prepare the child for burial. But nobody was at home: everyone was in the field. The woman, in an heaviness

and trouble of spirit, being herself alone, prepared the child to the burial. Her husband coming home, not having great love towards her, accused her of the murder; and so she was taken and brought to Cambridge tower. But as far as we could learn through earnest enquiry, we believed the woman was not guilty, all the circumstances well considered.

Immediately after this I was called to preach before the king at Windsor, where his majesty, after the sermon was done, did most familiarly talk with me in a gallery. When I saw my time, I kneeled before his majesty, opening the whole matter; and afterwards most humbly desired his majesty to pardon that woman. The king most graciously heard my humble request, insomuch that I had a pardon ready for her at my return homewards. In the meantime that same woman was delivered of a child in the tower at Cambridge, whose godfather I was, and Mistress C. was godmother. But all that time I told her nothing of the pardon, only exhorting her to confess the truth, waiting to see.

Soon the time came when she looked to suffer death. I came as I was wont to instruct her. She most earnestly required me to find the means that she might be purified before her suffering; for she thought she should have been damned, if she should die without purification. Whereon Master Bilney and I told her that law was made unto the Jews, and not unto us; and that women lying in child-bed be not sinfully unclean neither is purification used to cleanse from sin. For women after child-birth be as well in the favour of God before they be purified as after. Thus this woman came to a good understanding of spiritual purification and forgiveness. Then I gave her the king's pardon, and she was freed.

This tale I told you when we hear such reports, we should not be too hasty in believing every tale, but rather suspend our judgment till we know the truth. Thus we shall mark hereby the great love and loving-kindness of God our loving Father, who shows himself so loving unto us, that though some women forget sometimes their own children, yet he will not forget us but

will hear us when we call upon him. As he says by the Evangelist: 'Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'

### **Our**

But one word is left, which we must needs consider, 'our'. Why does he say 'our' and not 'my'? This word teaches us to consider that the Father of heaven is a Father we share, my neighbour's Father as well as mine; the poor man's Father as well as the rich. He is not a peculiar Father, but a Father to the whole church and congregation, to all the faithful. Be they ever so poor, so foul and despised, yet he is their Father as well as mine. Therefore I should not despise them.

Here may we perceive what communion is between us. When I pray, I pray not for myself alone, but for all others. When they pray, they pray not for themselves only, but for me. For Christ has so framed this prayer, that I must needs include my neighbour in it. Therefore all those which pray this prayer, pray as well for me as for themselves.

This is a great comfort to every faithful heart, when we consider all the church pray for us. For amongst such a great number there be some whose prayer God will hear, as it appeared by Abraham's prayer, which prayer was so effectual, that God would have pardoned Sodom and Gomorrah if he might have found but ten good persons therein. Likewise Paul in shipwreck preserved his company by his prayer.

There be some which gather out of scripture, that the prayer of Stephen was the means of the conversion of Paul. Thus our Saviour taught us to pray in common for all; therefore we ought to follow him, and to be glad to pray one for another: for we have a common saying among us, 'Whosoever loveth me, loveth my hound'. So, whosoever loveth God, will love his neighbour, which is made after the image of God.

### **Prayer a priority**

Here is to be noted, that prayer has one

property before all other good works of faith: for with my alms I help but one or two at once, but with my faithful prayer I help all. I desire God to strengthen all living, but specially 'those which be of the household of faith'. Yet we ought to pray with all our hearts for them which do not believe, that God will turn their hearts and renew them with his Spirit. Yea, our prayers reach so far, that our worst enemy ought not to be omitted. Here you see what an excellent thing prayer is, when it proceeds from a faithful heart; it far passes all the godly works that we can do.

### **Prayer teaches lowliness**

Now to make an end; we are admonished here in love, and taught that God is not only a private Father, but a common Father unto all the faithful; be they ever so poor and miserable in this world, he is their Father. Here we may learn humility and lowliness: specially great and rich men learn here not to be lofty or to despise the poor. For when you despise the poor man, whom do you despise? You despise him who calls God his Father. Peradventure he may be more acceptable and more regarded in his sight than you. Those proud persons may learn here to leave their loftiness. But there be a great many which little regard this: they think themselves better than others, and despise and contemn the poor. They will not hear the poor's causes, nor defend them from wrong and oppression of the rich and mighty. Such proud men despise the Lord's prayer: they should be as caring of their brethren as of themselves. Such humility, love and carefulness towards our neighbours, we learn by this word 'Our'.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore I desire you on God's behalf, let us cast away all disdain, all pride, yea, and all bibble-babble. Let us pray this prayer with understanding and great deliberation; not following the trade of Pharisees, which was without understanding. There be but few which can say from the bottom of their hearts, 'Our Father'. Neither Muslims, nor Jews, nor yet impenitent sinners, can call God their Father. The promise of hearing is

made unto them only which be faithful and believe in God; which endeavour themselves to live according unto his commandments. For scripture saith, 'The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears open unto their prayers.' But who are those righteous? Every penitent sinner, that is sorry from the bottom of his heart for his wickedness, and believes that God will forgive him his sins for his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's sake.

# Train the Child

The 4th in a Series of  
articles taken from a script prepared in  
1956  
by Annie Torrance

## First Years at School

### Readjustment

**T**he time comes when our little ones begin to leave the nest in the home. The growth of mind and body necessitate it. The energies of the growing child demand it. Parents have mixed feeling about this intrusion into their nest when the time arrives for the children to go to school—that is particularly the case with the mother. But children come to the stage when they need more occupation mentally as well as physically.

To earnest Christian parents this brings some apprehension. Hitherto the control of their children has been entirely in their own hands. They have been loved, nourished and cared for in body and mind, as well as sheltered from much that will likely come their way now. Other influences will be brought to bear upon the children's lives, and mothers wonder if their children will be all they would choose and desire.

Then there is the mixing with other children from a variety of homes. Will lessons taught be unlearned? In any case new phases in the pattern of living will be followed, and the anxious parent cannot but have some anxiety over whether her child will be different.

### School a happy place

It is wise, however, to face the new situation by accepting the facts and doing all she can to make things go well for the child. If she has availed herself of the first years in fitting and preparing the child according to the pattern God has indicated to us, then things are likely to go well. Good seed will now begin to bear good fruit. If the child has learned to obey, to be considerate of others, been taught to listen and has been trained in good habits, then school should be a happy place from the start and the child will be spared from having to learn much in what may well be a less congenial and more difficult way.

Some children are sent to school by par-

ents who could not control them at home. School can then become a kind of escape for the easy-going parent. The harassed teacher may have a hard task in bringing about what should have been done in the home. How easily a good class of children is spoilt by a few difficult ones, which need not have happened if the parents had spent more time in preparing their children in the right way. Unfortunately in these cases school has sometimes left a bad impression on the child's mind for years, which should not have happened.

### **Making the best of opportunities**

If Christian parents have been considerate in the training of their children and have won their confidence, then their relations with them will be able to continue along much the same line as in the earlier years—at least for a considerable time. It must be recognised that they have gone to school for a purpose and that this is the beginning of that part of their training that is to prepare them for their ultimate vocation in life. It is wise to take a long view of things even now and determine to make the best of all the opportunities that come along, and to put aside all preconceptions and prejudices.

Some children may be a little hesitant at first over the school adventure. The thought of being separated from the parent may bother some and they will need to be encouraged and be disarmed of their fears, but with help there is no reason why children should not soon adapt themselves to the new life. New occupations will certainly make their own appeal.

### **Parental Interest**

The important thing is that the parents should be deeply interested in the school life of their children. Once children realise this, their confidence and feeling of security in school life will grow and their interest in everything will be intensified. Children do not like to feel they are being got rid of, or that they are not wanted. Through the right attitude of the parents, children will look forward to telling their parents what happens at school each day. They will

naturally want to share these with those they feel love them.

### **Encouragement**

Parents ought to do all they can to encourage this, by taking a keen interest in all that concerns the child. It is in this simple way that new relations become established between child and parent which in its very small way is the beginning of what will later prove an avenue of good influence for right decisions at a critical time. If children feel free to talk over with their parents their school life, their friends and games, and all that pertains to their new life, they will be happy and school and home will be bound together in a meaningful and helpful way.

Unfortunately some parents do not have much patience in these matters, and even show impatience which discourages children from opening up their minds and airing their thoughts about their school activities. But parents will lose much if they do not try to retain the confidence and frankness of earlier years. The outcome may be that children will quite unconsciously develop an independent personality too soon, and begin to hold back things from their parents that the latter ought to know or be aware of.

Moreover the opportunity is then missed for emphasising the good that is being taught at school, and of smoothing out difficulties. By being interested in the everyday things of school life the parents will be better able to encourage the spiritual progress of their children as well.

### **A new world**

This beginning of school life marks a big change from the simpler early years in the shelter of the home, although of course the child's early impressions continue to have their due effect. A new world is opening up, for good and possibly also for things not so good. In a miniature way school life is already life in the world, and through school the impact of the world outside will increasingly be felt.

At school the child begins to mix with other children who come from dif-

ferent backgrounds and who naturally have a variety of dispositions and characteristics. The beginnings of many new experiences are here and the parents who desire the well-being of their children will want to become involved in the child's school affairs from the very start. These first six years of school life lay the foundation for another six, the earlier preparing the child in mentality and general outlook for the latter, in none of which can the parents afford simply to leave everything to the influence of others. These are crucial years that do much to form the more difficult teenage years, when parents will have to adapt themselves to their children. Too many parents treat these early school years as insignificant.

In these days when children seem to

*parents should be deeply interested in the school life of their children*

mature earlier than they used to, when they hear so much about adult affairs through television, parents need to be on their tiptoes, if they hope to guide their children into a right way of life and thought. It is never too early to begin. The fostering of spiritual life in children must also go on, and the impression made on the child of the claims of God through outward and visible things is the special responsibility of the parents. This character-formation is like a building. Even though the foundations may be good, the building itself must not be flimsy and faulty.

## **Grace and Law**

### **The Lord's Day**

The principles set out in the Ten Commandments should permeate the

atmosphere of every home, and be built into people's characters. Some may argue that the Law has been superseded by Grace—but Grace and the Gospel are the fulfilment of the Law which has taken place through Christ. Jesus in fact enlarged the Commandments in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, and summed up the whole Law in the golden rule: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.' Here we have plain instruction in the way that we should train our children, for which school days afford plenty of opportunity.

Parents who are anxious that their children should grow up in the fear of the Lord are concerned over the modern trend to depart from at least two of the Commandments: 'Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy' and 'Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.' The difficulty over these injunctions grows more acute as the children grow older and mix with so many others who come from less God-fearing homes.

As a nation and people we seem to be ever departing from the old conception of the Sabbath Day. The love of pleasure and leisure has invaded our land and finds its expression in Sunday sports, picnics, and special bus tours, which take families away from home. The Sabbath was undoubtedly created for man and especially that we might rest and become renewed in spirit for our daily calling, but it was not for physical re-creation only but for spiritual renewal that it was ordained, and primarily for worship of God our Maker.

It should be a day when we store up strength and courage for the warfare we wage during the week, and when faith becomes more certain through hearing the preaching of God's Word. It is surely obvious that this is a special day for the

well-being of our children, that they may be built up in the knowledge and love of God, and be fortified with all possible spiritual equipment for life and the demands it will constantly be making on them.

However, parents must arrange for it, and do everything they can to make this possible. On no account must we distort the nature of the Sabbath or turn it into a day of boredom! There are books that can be read, different from those of everyday, and games that can be played which are constructive and uplifting, or at least that do not run counter to the fact that the Lord's Day is different from the other days of the week.

It is a good thing to have special games, handiwork, as well as books that are kept for Sunday. If parents find joy in going to Church, the children will doubtless find the same joy too. A wise parent can decide how best to utilise this precious Day by infusing the right spirit into it, avoiding all 'don'ts' as much as possible and yet finding an outlet for otherwise restrained energies. The main thing is to keep the spirit of the Day rather than make the letter of it repulsive.

### Honouring parents

'Honour your father and mother.' Few things are more distressing than to see people forsaking this commandment, and it now seems very common. One wonders how that ever came about. We call ourselves a Christian nation, but, alas, these precepts that really make a Christian nation are brushed aside and forgotten. Children are quick to copy other children and when those children come from non-Christian homes the task of teaching the Christian way is much more difficult.

We have seen how essential it is to teach obedience and respect to others and this has to be insisted on continually all through the school years. The slightest attitude of disrespect to either parent

should always be dealt with at once and resisted by both parents. Respect toward others outside of the family should also be required, and this means that the parents must be careful not to criticise others before the child, or belittle them in any way.

That the child should always honour his parents is an imperative from which there must be no deviation. To give way or ignore it will help the child to become defiant. Besides, it is one of those things of most importance in God's eyes, for if children do not respect their parents whom they see, how are they likely to respect God whom they do not see? The parent is the earthly representative of God and disrespect toward him or her is a grave fault.

### Children are not angels

No children will ever be perfect and school children are not angels. All kinds of little quarrels, tiffs, unfairness, the misuse of each other's things, and misunderstandings, are bound to crop up in their little world. If a parent can turn all these things into the opportunity to apply the spirit of the Commandments and the Word of God, then a solid foundation will be laid which will stand the test out in the wider world in years to come.

Much is said about getting on with one another among nations as among individuals, but much can be done in home and school to bring this about. It is easier to learn in the home and the school before people are caught up in the passions, greed, selfishness, and ambition pursued at others' expense that arise among the undisciplined and unbridled natures of people among whom they may have to live and work.

### Making School a Success

#### Helping with homework

In the course of school days things won't always run smoothly. To make school a success the parent must as far as possible support the teacher, and refrain from criticism. The child may be at fault and if children think that their parents will

***on no account must we distort the nature of the Sabbath or turn it into a day of boredom***

champion them whether they are in the right or in the wrong it will have a warping effect on their minds. The better way is to help the child.

School can be a miserable place for a child who falls behind the other children in lessons, but constant help can alter things very much. Some parents are loath to give the time, but when the happiness of the child is at stake the sacrifice ought to be made. With plenty of help and perseverance in explaining lessons the child will not only come to like school, but the bond between child and parent will be deepened.

Many children need personal help in the early years in addition to what they get at school, especially when they are slow to understand what is being taught to the whole class together, but when they once grasp the facts they will make quicker progress themselves. In this way problems can often be resolved away, rough places made plain and crooked places made straight—if the parents will only be concerned and take enough trouble.

### **The tragic side of life**

Sooner or later children will learn other things at school than lessons. Little incidents will crop up which touch the sad

and tragic side of life and perhaps the sordid as well. Children are apt to relate what happens in their own homes or things they have overheard in adult conversations. These may send a child anxiously to his parents for an explanation, and of course a satisfactory one should be given. The truth should never be avoided. But it is a good thing to steer children away as far as possible from the things that are likely to depress and worry them.

### **Plenty of activity**

All children should be encouraged to take part in some school sport or some sort of team activity. Plenty of activity keeps them healthy in every way, and as they grow in strength and knowledge they will be able to tackle the difficult problems of life all the better for having been free in their early days.

School holidays offer a good opportunity for parents to share their life with their children. Walks in the country, or climbing mountains, picnics in the park or excursions to the seaside will keep children away from undesirable company and perhaps mischief, and the parents will reap much if they make themselves companionable to their children in the off school times.

### **Love never fails**

The greatest thing in the world is love, taught St Paul. 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.'

Here, then, we have the perfect picture of what family life with our children should be. If our children can only absorb this kind of love, how much they will be saved from. The parents who seek to overcome and live this kind of love-life are those who will have the most influence over their children. As we ourselves practise the love of God in the home and demonstrate it in our family relations, so our children will understand God and be drawn to him.

We cannot hold them back—the time must come when they will be launched out into the world, but let us make sure as far as possible that we teach them, and make every possible use of the God-given opportunities for the training of our children, from the cradle on through the school years and perhaps even beyond.

# Grief and Grieving

Bill Webster

## Grief is normal

Grief is not a disease. It is the normal human response to a significant loss. People may encourage you to 'be strong' or 'don't cry'. But how sad it would be if someone we cared about died and we didn't cry, or we carried on as if nothing had happened. I'd like to think that someone will miss me enough to shed a tear after I'm gone. Wouldn't you? When you lose someone special from your life, you are going to grieve.

Your grief is saying that you miss the person and that you are struggling to adjust to a life without that special relationship. Admittedly, saying that grief is normal does not minimize its difficulty. It may be one of the most challenging experiences of your life. But you are not crazy, or weak, or 'not handling things'. You are experiencing grief as a normal response after a significant loss.

## The worst kind of grief is yours

A loss is a very personal matter. Your loss seems like the worst possible thing that could happen to you. Sometimes people ask if it is more difficult to lose a spouse than to lose a child. Others question if it is worse to lose someone after a lingering illness or if they die suddenly from a heart attack. While these circumstances make each loss different, they are not important to you right now. The

worst kind of loss is yours. When you lose a significant person from your life, whatever the relationship, it hurts. You have the right to feel the loss and grieve the absence of that person.

Grief is painful. Loss is one of the most difficult human experiences: there is no easy way around it. We may try to avoid the pain. We may attempt to get over it as quickly as possible. But most often it simply does not work that way. Helen Keller said, 'The only way to get to the other side is to go through the door.' Grief is healthy: it allows us to reorganize, to heal, to learn and to grow. We need to find the courage to go through this experience of grief. Learning this is the first key to recovery.

## Your grief is intimately connected to the relationship

Every relationship holds a special significance. To fully interpret your grief response, you must understand what the relationship brought to your life and what has been lost from your life. You will grieve the loss of a parent differently from the loss of a friend. Each made a different contribution to your life and this affects your grief response. Two individuals both experiencing the loss of a spouse may grieve quite differently because of the differing circumstances of the relationship, the duration of the marriage, or the level of happiness.

## Grief is hard work

A grief response is often referred to as 'grief work'. The process requires more energy to work through than most people expect. It takes a toll on us both physically and emotionally. This is why we often feel so fatigued after a loss or why we may feel apathetic toward people and events. The problem is often compounded by people's expectations of us to be strong and to get over grief quickly.

## Your grief will take longer than most people think

Society has unrealistic expectations about mourning and often responds inappropriately. Most people do not understand what is normal in grief, expecting us to get over it quickly and expressing these expectations in ways that seem less than sensitive. Most have not learned that grief comes and goes and takes much longer than most people expect.

How long will grief last? It is finished when it is finished. The first few months may be particularly intense. The first year brings many challenges, especially the first Christmas, the first birthday, anniversary, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, 'a year ago today' day, and many other occasions which remind us of our loss. All are difficult days and we

need to anticipate them, know they are normal, and be compassionate with ourselves.

Some writers describe the second year of grief as the lonely year when the realization of the life without the deceased becomes even more of a reality. Take your time.

Your grief will affect every part of your life.

## Emotionally

Grief is an emotional response and we often experience an avalanche of emotions with an intensity that surprises us. Interestingly, most people cope with challenges in the same way throughout their lives. People who have developed good coping tools in earlier crises tend to bring these skills to their grieving work. Those who have coped by running away or denying earlier problems, will probably react in a similar way to grief. If you find your coping strategies are not working well, perhaps you can seek out a support group or a therapist where you can discover a new approach.

## Physically

Grief affects the body just as it affects the mind. You may experience some of the following symptoms: a knot in the stomach, feelings of shakiness, weakness at the knees, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, fatigue, digestive problems, appetite disruptions or sleep disorders. These may be normal responses. Yet saying so does not minimize their importance.

Medications can be helpful in some circumstances, although drugs used in an effort to help you avoid the pain can hurt you more. We cannot escape the pain of grief; therefore do consult your doctor about any physical symptoms and follow medical advice.

Because you are physically stressed it is important to get good nutrition even when you may not feel like eating, to get proper rest even when sleep may be difficult, and to get adequate exercise even though you may feel tired or apathetic. Grief takes all the energy you can muster, so look after your health.

## Socially

Many people find it difficult even to think about a social life after a loss. It can be stressful to face friends, to return to work, or even to attend your place of worship. You may feel people are looking at you differently, perhaps feeling sorry for you, or treating you as if you are 'broken'.

The loss of a spouse may make it difficult to return to a social circle where you were regarded as a couple. Other losses present similar challenges.

It is not easy to get back into the social swing, but let me make a few observations: the first time is the worst; you yourself will know when you are ready; if you go somewhere, go with a friend, and, if you find you are too upset, excuse yourself.

Many people find that a support group can be a healthy transition between the time of loss and full social involvement, and often can provide a place for friendship and a forum to discuss the challenges.

## Spiritually

A significant loss can often shake our belief system and may affect our beliefs about life itself. Life is not always fair. The death may have meant not only the end of the relationship, but also the end of our hopes and dreams. Whatever our religious convictions, we may wonder why this has happened, why our prayers have not been answered or where the meaning or even the justice is in it all. Where is God in all this? Does he care? Why does he seem silent?

There are no easy answers. Faith enables us to accept what we may not understand. As Anne Kaiser Stern says, 'Faith is a powerful energy when it represents the trust that, with struggle, our sorrows can be overcome.'

## Grief is unpredictable

You may experience a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not just those generally associated with grief, such as sadness, crying, and depression. Some of your responses may seem quite un-

*we may wonder why  
this has happened ...  
where the meaning or  
even the justice is in  
it all*



characteristic. 'This isn't like me', you may think.

Grief is unpredictable. We cannot present it in a neat package. Just when you think you have figured it out, something comes along to surprise you. In an unexpected moment you find yourself missing the person again. In fact, the one predictable characteristic about grief is that it is unpredictable.

### **There may be 'secondary losses'**

The death of any individual, difficult as this is of itself, may also precipitate many other changes in your life. For some, it may mean the loss of financial security, a home, or even their independence. For some, it may mean the loss of a role, such as the role of being a parent to a child who has now died. For others, it may be the loss of your dreams of 'living happily ever after' or enjoying retirement together. For a daughter, it may be the sad realization that her father will never walk her down the aisle.

There may be many changes of environment, status, and alteration of relationships because of the death. Each one has its own impact and each one needs to be mourned.

A significant loss changes the way we look at life, at ourselves and at others

Everything seems different now. After the loss of a spouse, it can be difficult to adjust to a world which saw you as part of a couple. It is a major adjustment to think of 'me' instead of 'we'. There are similar adjustments, unique to every situation, regardless of whom we have lost.

Every significant loss changes our life: the roles we played in the relationship, the way we think of ourselves, the way others regard us, even the way we think of life or of God or of the meaning of it all.

When someone we care about dies, a part of us dies as well. Life will not be the same again. Mind you, let's balance this negative thought by realizing that a much greater part of us lives on. Yes, a chapter in your life has closed; but now a new chapter can begin.

Admittedly, we may not have wanted

it this way and sometimes may wonder if we can or even want to go on. Our grief process seeks to enable us to be reconciled with the past and find the strength and the courage to move toward the future.

### **Grief comes and goes**

We have said that grief is not a disease. A sore throat is painful for a few days; then the pain eases and gradually disappears. Grief does not work this way. Our healing process is also different from a sickness model.

Sometimes, at first, we do not feel the pain of grief because we are in shock and numb. Often the pain is more intense some months after the event. Even then, grief is not unlike a roller coaster. One day we feel better, the next we find ourselves in the depths of despair.

Just when we think we are getting over it, we may experience another devastating setback. This can be discouraging to those who do not know what is happening. We need to realize that this is how grief works itself out and trust the process, to help us work towards reconciliation.

### **Effective grief work is not done alone**

Many people mistakenly believe that grief is so personal that we should keep it to ourselves. These people mean well, but they are not being helpful. By using clichés or expressing unrealistic expectations, they make the mourners feel like shutting themselves away. Because they often feel uncomfortable with our grief, they do not mention the loss shortly after the funeral is over. There seems to be a conspiracy of silence. People are afraid to say or do the wrong thing, so they say and do nothing.

However, grieving people need to talk. This is how you come to terms with all that has occurred. You may find that not everyone will be willing or even able to respond to you. In fairness, not everyone can. Accept that and try to find a support group or a counsellor who can help. It may be an encouragement to find that others are going through a similar

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

*the one predictable  
characteristic about  
grief is that it is  
unpredictable*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24  
experience. Grief is about coping with the loss of a relationship. Sharing experiences with others who have been through the deep places can bring relief.

**Bill Webster**, a Baptist minister originally from Arbroath, Scotland, is at present Director of the Centre for the Grief Journey, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. A university graduate with degrees in psychology and theology, he completed his doctorate at the University of Toronto in 1990. Widowed in 1983, he struggled to come to terms with his loss, as well as coping with bringing up his two sons.

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*Care About Dies* from Dr Bill Webster's 'Grief Pack' which includes a set of 5 videos as well as much helpful material for use by ministers and others pastoring those grieving. Further details and full catalogue obtainable from: 'Centre for the Grief Journey', 9 St Andrews Crescent, Arbroath, Scotland DD11 5DF.

# Dimensions of Christ in Disney's The Lion King

Marc Bircham

*(Contemporary films are having a subtle influence on the thinking of our generation. Even the blockbuster money-spinners can be viewed critically to expose the underlying thoughts and values. Such insight is helpful as pastors engage in dialogue with their people. Ed.)*

*Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, he has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Revelation 5:5*

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8*

## Introduction

There is little doubt that the Christian faith has, throughout the centuries, had a profound influence on every aspect of art. From its foundation Christians have used art to demonstrate in a visual form how they perceive Jesus, and also the events which are recorded in the text of the gospels. What is true of art of past eras is true of the more modern art of film production. One recent example of this was Martin Scorsese's adaptation of the A.D. Kazantzakis' novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988); no matter what your opinion is of Jesus being portrayed as a man with doubts about his destiny, the main focus appears to be on the work and person of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

That's all very well for films where Jesus is the star of the show but what about popular films which appear to be

dealing with more secular issues? I would suggest even there we can see indications of the Christ event. In fact sometimes an aspect of the life of Jesus can be made more profound in a contemporary setting, dealing with many of the everyday issues each of us face.

In this article I plan to look at one film which, although clearly not setting out to be a 'Christ film', does contain within its narrative and its pictures clear images of Christ. These gospel stories and images, according to Malone, have become an intrinsic part of western culture.<sup>2</sup> Metaphors of crucifixion, resurrection and miracles are used by believer and non-believer alike. It is not the use of such devices that make a film distinctive rather it is whether or not Christianity is portrayed as of faith, or of culture.

## Background

*The Lion King*, directed by Roger Allens and Bob Minkoff, was released in 1994. The screenplay was by Irene Mecchi, Jonathan Roberts and Lindy Woolverton.<sup>3</sup> It was Disney's thirty second full length animation, a major project with over six hundred animators taking three years to complete. Described by one critic as, 'One of the

best from the Disney stable', the film achieved high critical acclaim.<sup>4</sup> The animation is of a very high quality, almost realistic, and one is taken in by the breathtaking African backdrop. This is due in part to the lengths to which the producers went in order to get things as accurate as possible.

Thomas notes that six members of the production team toured East Africa in 1991 returning with drawings, paintings and a real feeling for the grandeur of the African wilderness.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the landscape is a major character in the whole film, as it draws one into the environment. Every attention was given to detail and even a professor of biology was brought in to discuss the movements of animals with the animation team.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike every other feature which went before it *The Lion King* was unique in a number of ways. It was the first Disney movie which was entirely crafted on story boards and plotting sessions by studio artists and writers.<sup>7</sup> Whereas previous films had been based on published material, folk tales, novels, short stories and plays, *The Lion King* was completely original. Another unique feature was the animation itself. As Thomas points out: 'Computer imagery accomplished something that would not have been

possible for animators alone, the stam-pede of a giant herd of wildebeest.<sup>8</sup>

Never before had computer technology been used to create such scenes in an animation; three dimensional models were created and articulated to walk and run in such a manner as to look natural. This scene alone took a year to complete. The film was also the first ever in Disney history not to include any human characters.

The film was not only successful in the eyes of the critics it was also a financial blockbuster, realising \$312.8 million in the USA alone.<sup>9</sup> Rose, notes that the video was the most popular consumer product in American history grossing more than Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.<sup>10</sup> This is a film of the nineties, not only in its use of technology. It reflects the age in which it was made. It is laden with many values and world views which pervade western culture today. If we apply to this film social science film criticism, as outlined by Eichenberger, what we see is a vivid reflection of the issues and the values which are contemporary, even postmodern, as the film acts a kind of mirror of our society.<sup>11</sup> Although steeped in a Judeo-Christian past, it has become multi-faith, multi-cultural, multi-myth, with an amalgam of values rather than one absolute truth.

*The Lion King* clearly 'tips its hat' not only to Christian narratives but also to a wide range of other elements including Hinduism, environmentalism, imperialism, and some new age concepts e.g., the circle of life. This multi-faceted approach is partly acknowledged by Don Hahn, producer of the film, who is quoted as saying: 'the film struck a reminiscent chord because it touched basic human themes, the story has a little bit of Moses, a little bit of Joseph and a little bit of Hamlet.'<sup>12</sup>

### Glimpses of Christ

According to Malone, in his essay, *Jesus on Our Screens*, when we use the term 'Christ figure' we are referring to those films in which we catch a glimpse of the 'Christ event'.<sup>13</sup> For example, in the recent film *Dead Man Walking*, we are confronted by a nun who in many ways demonstrates the compassion and for-

giving aspects of Jesus' personality. She is clearly not Christ, but her actions resemble his ministry and mission as recorded in the gospels. 'Jesus figures', on the other hand, are any representations of Jesus himself, for example, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) etc.

In *The Lion King* I would suggest that we, the spectators, are continually confronted with events from the life of Christ, some of which are quite blatant, for one feature of animation is its tendency to be rather crude, lacking the subtlety of other forms of film, as is certainly the case in this film.

Lloyd Baugh points out that the profile of a Christ figure in a film can include a whole range of elements, all of which can be recognised in the fullness of their meaning in Jesus the Christ, and also to a lesser extent in the representation of the figure of Christ represented.<sup>14</sup> At the same time the 'Christ figure' in time takes on a number of different forms which serve as an appropriate metaphor of the totality of the Christ event or some dimension.

### The Guise of a Lion

Baugh focuses, not surprisingly, on human characters rather than on animals. I think that his analysis is useful. He examines Christ as portrayed in various guises including priest, action hero, child, and clown, but no lion. Christ the lion is, however, not new. As the New Testament quotations with which I began this article illustrate, Christ the lion and Satan the lion are metaphors with biblical precedent. When applied to Christ, the lion is viewed as a kingly figure, one with authority, power over peoples and dominions. When applied to the devil the lion is seen as one prowling about, looking for his next unsuspecting victim—two very distinct images, the same animal but not with the same motives.

On one hand we have Mufasa, a good

king, well loved and respected by his subjects, an individual with concerns for the whole balance of nature and for his family. On the other, we have his brother Scar, a dark figure, whose only concern appears to be his own self advancement—an anti-Christ. The use of the lion is also used in C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series of books where we are left in little doubt that Aslan is a Christ figure.<sup>15</sup>

Baugh does not confine himself to guises of 'Christ figures'. He also demonstrates just how widely and how variously 'Christ figure' imagery is used in popular film. He acknowledges that no film actually reflects the totality of the Christ event but that dimensions are evident in many popular films. He then attempts to demonstrate this by listing twelve dimensions of the filmic Christ figure including: reflecting the transcendental character, reflecting the actions of Jesus, commitment to justice, miracle worker, conflict with authorities, redeemer, Jesus withdrawing to pray, passion, shedding of blood, via crucis, the use of music to represent the passion, and resurrection scenes.<sup>16</sup>

### Dimensions of Christ (within the Lion King)

#### Redeemer, Shedding of Blood, Passion

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*<sup>17</sup>

One of these dimensions, Baugh suggests, is that of redeemer, one who gives up his life so others might be saved. This is clearly an action of Christ for it was on the cross through his sacrificial act he redeemed humanity. In a sense he took on that role previously held in the Old Testament by the scapegoat. This redeemer model is very evident in the film in two significant scenes, with two different characters, Mufasa the father and

*the picture we get here is of a vulnerable  
Christ who shares our situation*

then later Simba the son.

The scene, in which Mufasa becomes redeemer, is one of the most powerful in the whole film. In fact, this scene is a pivotal moment on which the film hinges. Mufasa has been set up by the evil Scar and runs to help his son who is hanging on to the end of a vulnerable branch as literally thousands of wildebeest are charging down the plain. It is clear that if there is no intervention, Simba will perish, so his father with no thought of his own survival leaps into the midst of the charging herd, risking life and limb, and grabs his son just in the nick of time. However, on throwing his son to the safety of a nearby bank, Mufasa falls back and is trampled on by the herd. Somehow he manages to get back on to his feet and scrambles up a rock face, clinging on for his life. Unfortunately for him, his evil brother is at the top and instead of coming to his aid

has saved.<sup>19</sup> Mufasa's redemption is more one of substitutionary redemption, the one dying for the other. One who has no direct responsibility for the situation of the other standing in his place and taking what was not his due. I would argue, therefore, that Mufasa's action is more like Christ than that of the protagonist in *Shane*. However, Baugh's categories merge on this point as he also has a category for shedding of blood, which is obviously a major component of this scene and one which raised criticism of the film for being too violent for young children.

The other clear picture of redemption in the film comes in one of the concluding scenes. The final battle has taken place between Simba, who has taken his father's role as redeemer, and Scar. Good has triumphed over evil and the world has been put to right. In this sophisticated animation the use of colour and music intensifies this redemptive scene. Animals have returned to the plain. What was a devastated dark, lifeless landscape has been transformed into a bright, warm glowing place where harmony abounds. The lion almost literally lies down with the lamb and things are as they should be, with variety and variation being the order of the day. This scene, although a bit over the top, through the change in the tone of the music, the weather conditions and in the rediscovery of colour, leaves us in no doubt that things are well once again. The art work throughout the film uses light and dark to enhance our understanding of the Christ dimension. Mufasa and Simba are bathed in light. The light shines on the cub Simba as the animals worship. Mufasa and Simba's kingdom is bathed in light also. On the contrary, Scar is always depicted in shades of grey and black.

As well as being clearly viewed as a redemption scene, there is another category of Baugh's into which this scene fits, that of commitment to justice. Simba as protagonist enters a community which has been ravished by corruption and self-seeking individualism and his people (animals) are freed from their yoke of slavery. Baugh, suggests that this is a popular motif in many

## *a devastated dark lifeless landscape has been transformed into a bright, warm, glowing place*

he pushes the exhausted Mufasa to his death.

The picture we get here is of a vulnerable Christ, one with whom we can identify, not some superbeing but rather one who shares our situation. Malone notes that this view represents what he refers to as 'christology from below', with its focus on the human character of Jesus. The advantage of this approach is, according to Malone, that we are presented with someone who can reveal our potential to us.<sup>18</sup>

The musical score by Hans Zimmer, although he received an award for this, was not very unique. The use of heavenly type music bursting through at vital moments highlights the Christ dimensions. As Mufasa rushes through the wildebeest, the music echoing the hooves of the animals, has a heavenly refrain in the background.

This clear picture of the redeemer is crude, unlike Baugh's example of the protagonist in *Shane* who, based on the scapegoat model, rides out into the desert having taken the sins of those he

westerns.<sup>20</sup>

### Transcendental Characteristic

*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven and said: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'*<sup>21</sup>

Another dimension of Christ, with which we are confronted in the film is what Baugh describes as, 'reflecting the transcendental character of the word made flesh.'<sup>22</sup> In other words these are events in the life of Christ which do not fit into other categories Baugh has established the mysterious elements of the life of Christ. The examples which Baugh gives as fitting into this category include, *ET The Extra Terrestrial* (1992), the 'Christ figure' from outer space, and the angel figure in Pasolini's *Terrema* (1968).<sup>23</sup>

The scene in question in *The Lion King* comes at the point when Simba has been confronted by Rafiki, a monkey-cum-witch doctor, who challenges Simba to come back from his enforced exile and take his rightful place in the Pride Lands. Simba is reluctant so Rafiki takes him to a place near a lake and at that place Mufasa's image appears in the sky and commands his son to take his place in the 'circle of life'. This scene is so closely reminiscent of Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist, that one wonders if it was lifted straight from there.

Here, as there, we have Rafiki, an enigmatic individual who lives in the wild away from others, preparing for the coming King, 'a voice calling in the wilderness,' sure of his mission and purpose in life. We also have water, and in both cases we have the priest figures touching the water. As a climax we have an epiphany, a direct encounter with the transcendent. In the gospels, we hear the words of God commissioning Jesus, his son, whom he loves, and in the other we have Mufasa, commending his son and encouraging him in his mission.

As I have stated above animation is a crude medium and no more so than in this scene in *The Lion King* where the

parallels are so unsubtle that they seem to be blatantly plageristic.

### Resurrection

*They asked her 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.'*<sup>24</sup>

The final dimension of Christ which I would like to focus on is what Baugh describes as post-death Jesus viewed as Christ, or the metaphorical representation of the resurrection. According to Baugh a film requires a resurrection event to authenticate it as a filmic 'Christ figure'.<sup>25</sup>

*The Lion King* obliges with yet another situation which looks as if it has come straight from the pages of the New Testament. Simba has been forced into exile by his wicked uncle aided by the hy-

## *a film requires a resurrection event to authenticate it as a filmic 'Christ figure'*

enas, a band who in many ways reflect the attitude of the Pharisees. The whole of the animal kingdom thinks that Simba has been done away with. The hyenas had been sent by Scar to kill Simba, only managing to drive him out of the plain, and are convinced that he will never return. As we watch Simba running off into the sunset, this is the film *via crucis* with echoes of the suffering Christ carrying his cross to Calvary. Simba runs until he can go no further, then sets himself down to die, ridden with needless guilt and shame laid on him by Scar.

Nala, Simba's childhood friend, strays into the jungle. When she is reunited with the adult kingly looking Simba, like Mary Magdalene she fails to recognise him until he speaks her name. Simba does, however, recognise Nala and on disclosing his identity, her spirits rise in expectation of Simba fulfilling his divine role.

When Simba eventually does return to Pride Rock, his home, his mother as with Nala before, fails to recognise her own son, believing him to be dead. In

fact on first sight she calls out her husband's name Mufasa as Simba looks just like him. Once again the parallels with the gospel accounts of the resurrection are clear to see. One who was dead has risen, friend and family fail to recognise him. There is also a point in the film when as Nala is searching for Simba she is informed by one of his friends, 'You won't find him here'. Again, echoes of the words of the angels on the resurrection morning.

While the scenes discussed are among the more significant glimpses of Christ there are numerous other aspects of the Christ figure within the film, for example: nativity, temptation, the conflict of Gethsemane, to name but a few.

## Discussion

### Critique of Baugh's analysis

The criteria suggested by Lloyd Baugh were used to examine the dimensions of Christ evident in *The Lion King*. This list of components which point to a 'Christ figure' in a film provided a useful structure which helped focus observations on particular aspects. This was preferable to considering isolated incidents. However, there were a few criticisms I would level at Baugh's lists. Firstly, there are a few points where the overlapping is so great that one has to ask whether there is any need for two categories when one would suffice. This was especially evident when looking at the shedding of blood and the passion. These two concepts are surely inseparable in the Christian tradition. The passion is that point at which the blood of the innocent victim is spilt for the guilty party. Moreover, the concept of redemption is linked so closely with the passion that here too the lines of distinction appear to blur. Baugh seems to wriggle out of this one by suggesting a scapegoat model, which has more in common with the Old Testament than with the Christ event.

Another problem I see in Baugh's analysis is that some dimensions are somewhat vague, in particular, the dimension which he says 'reflects the actions of Jesus'. This could encompass

any action of Jesus from his birth to his ascension. Surely Baugh is not suggesting that when we see a character in a film walking in a field we immediately assume that here we have a reflection of Jesus, as the gospels record him walking in the field. I am sure what Baugh is alluding to are those aspects of the life of Jesus which marked him out as the Christ, I wonder if this is a catch-all component in which we can place any others which do not fit elsewhere.

Moreover, Baugh's analysis is not exhaustive and others could be added. For example, the metaphors Jesus used of himself (e.g. bread, wine, water, light) could be included in his analysis.

I would also suggest that in relation to *The Lion King*, the images of Christ were so obvious that there was no need for any pro forma. On viewing the film for the first time I was struck by the clear representations of Christ within it. Perhaps, this was due to the storyline being created by the film makers rather than adapted from a traditional tale. Baugh's analysis might be more useful in other films and feature animations where the Christ figures would be more hidden.

## Conclusions

Some might scorn the analysis of the film in terms of its use of dimensions of Christ, claiming that it is simply a cartoon for children to enjoy. Walt Disney, the founder of the Disney corporation, himself once stated: 'We just try and make a good picture. And then the professors come along and tell us what we do.'<sup>26</sup>

The aim of film makers at the end of the day is to make a good film which will in turn make money for their corporation. That being so, it is clear from studying the film closely that one is struck by two things. Firstly there are the ways in which, through the goal of making a good picture, world views are transmitted and reinforced. Secondly we see how Biblical content has influenced this particular film. The evidence is quite unequivocal. The parallels are just too similar to be mere coincidence. Even the producer suggested that there was, 'a bit of Moses' and 'a bit of Joseph'.<sup>27</sup>

It may be argued these issues are simply life and death issues which are common to all humanity, and again that would be a fair criticism. But figures appearing in the sky and giving advice to sons along with resurrection events surely go beyond this.

While this is the case, it may be that the allusions to Biblical material are merely manifestations of the background of the writers, i.e. American, white, middleclass. There were also concerns regarding the colour coding of the film and the stereotyping of certain characters. Brown points out that the good animals are cream/reddish, while the bad are always black or grey. This use of colour is quite marked and is not solely confined to individual characters as light and dark are used throughout the film in quite powerful ways.

Another criticism is the role of the Queen, Simba's mother. Throughout the film she only rarely appears and more often than not in the role as the primary carer for the young lion cub. The main focus of the film is on the male characters for it is they who are the important players in the whole narrative. Geoff Brown, writing in *The Times*, warned parents that this is not a film for 'tiny tots' as the violence and guilt surrounding Simba, the main character, may disturb.<sup>28</sup>

One interesting criticism of the film comes from Segun Oyekurure, a Nigerian film critic who said of the film: 'It perpetuates the old stereotypical view that the best you can get out of Africa is the animal kingdom.'<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as I have previously conceded there are other issues and views on display, and perhaps in examining one aspect we can miss the whole picture.

The balance of the natural world is certainly evident, as the words in the title song point out we are all part of a circle of life, dependent on each other for survival. The environment is a huge issue. When the evil Scar is in control, an individual focused on his own needs and greed, the environment collapses, with no signs of life, all being desolate and barren. However, what a transformation when the young Simba comes to the throne and the balance is brought

back. Life comes from that which was previously dead: rivers flow, flowers grow, the rain stops and the music gets cheerier.

The film makers set out to create a modern and new narrative. They acknowledge the film includes many elements including new age concepts, more traditional Biblical allusions, Hinduism, environmentalism and imperialism. In many ways as a contemporary film it is a pastiche of these philosophies and traditional tales. However, the postmodern ethos is overshadowed at times, for example, when hedonism is discredited. True postmodernity would accept it, as all philosophies of life are to be tolerated.

The film-makers would appear to have been influenced to a great extent by the social cultural ground in which they were rooted. Nevertheless, one still gets the impression when viewing the film that Christianity is one and perhaps the major source of focus, with the allusions to the Old and New Testaments, as well as the overarching and continual struggle between good and evil. This is due to the cultural background of the writers, whether consciously or unconsciously.

However, I was probably conscious of these images because of my interest in theology. Anyway is it reasonable to make such claims on a film which was first and foremost produced to simply entertain? Perhaps the 'Christian' aspects of the film are just some kind of by-product of the culture in which the film was made. Would such images be evidenced in a film made in the United Kingdom, or is the Judeo-Christian tradition so much part and parcel of American psyche that they simply see these 'images' as 'normal'? Malone suggests that many films have Christ-figures, both consciously and unconsciously in their work,<sup>30</sup> Jesus is so admired that his words and actions have become interpreted by peoples both inside and outside the Christian tradition.

So is it simply the case that when we watch any film, all we see is what we want to see? Would my Hindu or Buddhist friends watching *The Lion King* see their traditions represented in this film

just as I see mine? My assumption is that these images are obvious but this view was not shared in the numerous reviews of the film, most seeing race, sex, and issues of imperialism as the primary focus. Even the makers of the film fail to acknowledge this Christ dimension, suggesting stories from the Old Testament and Shakespeare as being at its heart.<sup>31</sup>

The ability of *The Lion King* to evoke strong response from every quarter points to its place within postmodern framework. It appears to have something to say to every component of society. The themes which appear in its narrative are clearly appealing as they respond to the human condition.

In this way this film stands on its own in the Disney tradition. It has broken free from the simple dualism of good versus bad and is far more self conscious, a result of not being tied to a fairy story or tale. Thus, *The Lion King* evokes in children and in adults too, the 'big' questions. My three year old son on watching *The Lion King* discussed the meaning of the circle of life. And on a recent daytime chatshow one of the hosts while discussing animation stated that *The Lion King* was far and beyond the best film she had ever watched.<sup>32</sup>

Why then does this 'cartoon' evoke such a response? There are two fundamental reasons. The first is due to the film's technological and visual quality. It is a brilliant piece of artwork, so good that one quickly forgets that all is a mere creation of animation and you find yourself believing that the backdrop is Africa and that the animals are real. Richard M. Gollin, in his article *Reading Films as They See Fit*, points out that in the early days of film production there were two very distinctive styles, one characterised by the work of the Lumiere brothers where they sent photographers into the streets to take pictures of 'realities' which were selected and then turned into film.<sup>33</sup> The other style pioneered by George Melies was characterised by its stop-motion, double exposure, matte paintings and simple photographic tricks, creating fantastic marvels to those early cinema goers. In *The Lion King* the producers have brought these two con-

cepts together, the use of animation which is clearly not reality, and produced it to such a high standard as to make the spectator believe what they are watching is real.

The second reason, as I have outlined above, is that *The Lion King* does address themes which are common to every one, issues of death, guilt, pride, envy, jealousy, power etc. This film touches a chord in us all. It can be argued that the dimensions of the Christ figure in the film are part of the origin of this. These Christ figures are of culture not of faith but the film at moments can include a movement towards otherness due to the atmosphere and tone at critical points.

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1 Kreitzer, L. J. *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow*, Sheffield, 1993 advances the argument that by studying the way a novelist or film-maker depicts Jesus we may see something fresh in the Gospel record. In this way the 'hermeneutical flow' is reversed. As well as asking what words we should use in the twentieth century to convey what the New Testament writers intended to say in the first, we can ask what light the words of the contemporary writer shed on the writings of the first followers of Jesus.

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3 Thomas, B. *Disney's Act of Animation: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules*, New York, 1997, p. 142.

4 Rose, S. . *Simon Rose's Classic Film Guide*, Glasgow, 1995, p.287.

5 Thomas, B. *Op. Cit.* p. 142

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7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.* p.143.

9 Rose, S. . *Op. Cit.* p.287

10 *Ibid.*

11 Eichenberger, A. , Approaches to Film Criticism in May, JR. (ed.), *Op. Cit.* p.8

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13 Malone, P. *Op. Cit.* pp.69-70

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- 17 Isaiah 53:5
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- 22 Baugh L. *Op. Cit.*. pp.205 206
- 23 *Ibid.* p.205
- 24 Jn.20:13f.
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- 26 Cited in Bryman,A, *Disney and his Worlds*, London, 1995, p.1.
- 27 Thomas B. - *Op. Cit.* . p. 143
- 28 *The Times*, October 8th, 1994, p.5.
- 29 *Ibid* October 20th. 1994, p.9.
- 30 Malone,P. in Marsh, C. and Ortiz, G, (eds.), *Op. Cit.* p.77f.
- 31 Thomas, B, *Op.Cit.*p.142.
- 32 Judy Finnigan on *This Morning*, Scottish, 10.20am October 1997, stated that although she enjoyed Disney's latest animation Hercules her all time favourite was *The Lion King* as it was far and beyond the best film she had ever watched.
- 33 Gollin, R.M. . Reading Films as they see Fit, in *Christianity and Literature*, vol.42, No.3, 1993, pp.392ff.



# Ann Allen meets Alasdair I Macleod

**Alasdair I Macleod is  
minister of Elder  
Memorial Free Church,  
Leith.**

***What takes a Professor of  
Apologetics and Practical  
Theology to minister to a tiny  
elderly congregation in an  
enormous building in an  
obscure corner of Leith? Read  
on and find out!***

**Ann:** Alasdair, was it always your destiny, do you think, to be minister in the Free Church?

Alasdair: From fairly on in my student years in Aberdeen there was a growing sense of responsibility and burden that

this is what I should do, and that if I did anything else I would be neglecting my duty.

**Ann:** You equipped yourself for ministry with further training in Westminster Theological Seminary? What lasting impressions did that leave with you?

Alasdair: I regard Westminster as the best Theological Seminary this side of Glory! I revelled in its emphasis on Biblical Theology and the redemptive historical approach of the Bible, dealing with all of scripture as an unfolding revelation with everything centred on Jesus Christ.

**Ann:** Life in the States must have been radically different to all you had known in the North of Scotland?

Alasdair: What I particularly enjoyed about Church life in the States, and what was so different from my own character and upbringing was the sense of being willing to try new strategies and if they did not work, reassessing and saying 'that failed so we won't do that again. We'll try a different approach'. Now my culture had been to say 'Let's not try that in case it does not work'. ...a much safer approach but I was taken by the sense of adventure and optimism I encountered in America and the way they applied their theology.

**Ann:** What followed that spell of theological study? More study?

Alasdair: No. I went back to Easter Ross-shire and spent 7 years from 1981-88 in Muir of Ord in a congregation with a Sunday morning attendance of 120-150, which was a strong Free Church in a small Highland village. I

don't know what I taught them but they certainly taught me a lot.

**Ann: Ten years on, would that picture still hold good for a strong Free Church presence in most Highland villages?**

Alasdair: I was privileged to go to a larger than average congregation. I think now the most that could be said is that the Free Church has a presence in many Highland villages, albeit a small one. However, although in some places we struggle, in others there is exciting growth with new strategies being implemented.

**Ann: This would be paralleled in the Church of Scotland where in some churches God is at work sovereignly and significantly without there being any apparent difference in preaching or the commitment of the people.**

Alasdair: Many of the places where things are happening, minister and people have thought through their situation and done things that humanly speaking have made a difference. They have not only prayed for revival, but done imaginative things and seen a response.

**Ann: Can you give examples of what you have observed that has brought results?**

Alasdair: Well, for example, a video was made in Rosskeen of the local work, and local testimonies and people in the parish were willing to take that and could identify with the folk and so the gospel was communicated. Congregations have also been involved in their communities in helpful social activities. I doubt if much of that sort of thing would have been attempted 10 years ago.

**Ann: What do you think the Free Church has to offer today's world**

**that is significantly distinctive at this point of millennial change?**

Alasdair: I find that very difficult to answer because I don't think in terms of denominational distinctives. There are people in the Free Church who would answer in terms of exclusive psalmody or of history of the denomination. I'm not really very interested in these arguments. I think the Free Church must prove itself in every situation to be a living Christian congregation offering a spiritual home, teaching the scriptures, welcoming people, praying and providing a base from which there is outreach and social action. I think of myself much more as a minister to a particular congregation. Next year there may be a big celebration to celebrate 100 years of staying out of the union of 1900 but I am not interested in arguing for the Free Church on those grounds. I appreciate my history but we can't rest on Thomas Chalmers' laurels to give ourselves an identity as a Church....we need to prove our worth today. I think we need to be more humble as a Church. I regard the Church of Scotland as the key to the Christian Good of Scotland.

**Ann: That might both astonish and dishearten those of us in the Kirk who see little to rejoice in!**

Alasdair: The Kirk has a presence right through the country and has so many evangelicals now compared to 50 years ago. There is no way that the Free Church can expand similarly or claim to be a National Church in that kind of way. We can offer a distinctive ministry in localities and in terms of our College, but we are a very small part of the national picture and for that reason the evangelical movement in the Church of Scotland interests me greatly.

**Ann: Does the Free Church suffer from being associated with a Highland culture so that it struggles for recognition south of Perth?**

Alasdair: Yes. we have a negative public image for that and other reasons.

Again in some specific areas that is being turned around. For example, in Dundee we have a very exciting situation where, in a new ministry, students have been drawn in, there is a second minister evangelising in the ethnic communities, and a youth worker is now employed, and that is not in any sense identified as a Highland community although it would have started as such a core group.

**Ann: You went from Muir of Ord to teach Apologetics and Practical Theology at the Free Church College. How important do you think it is that Practical Theology be taught in a Faith Community?**

Alasdair: Our situation is very different from most of the Church of Scotland. Our training is all done in the context of the ministry of the Word, which is not possible for example, in New College where the student body is so diverse and the number of ministry candidates is tiny. Our students are being reminded that all their training is with the focus on ministry. I couldn't offer in depth specialisms as Westminster does but I tried to give a comprehensive overview with everything founded on exegesis of the Word of God...a pattern modelled on Westminster.

**Ann: Now you have been back in ministry for 18 months? Why this particular church at this particular time? Elder Memorial is in Casselbank Street, Leith isn't it?**

Alasdair: I stayed longer in College than I had anticipated, and decided I was going back into ministry. I was open to ministering anywhere in Scotland. One Sunday evening I was preaching on the challenge to come to commitment and the challenge to live out the gospel to a congregation of 18 mainly elderly people in a building that held 500. At the

end of the service one of the elders came to me and asked if I would like a challenge myself and then just gestured around him at the empty pews. I had preached myself into a job! It was very hard to get away from a sense of responsibility for that place if they decided to call me. That was the decisive moment and the months that followed confirmed that the challenge of the sermon had been applied to me and I took up ministry some 20 months ago.

**Ann: Numerically it must have been a pretty daunting prospect. Was the challenge in terms of make or break?**

Alasdair: Yes, I saw the challenge in terms of closure or rebuild, in terms of contacting the community with the gospel, and also in terms of Free Church perceptions. When Free Church families come to Edinburgh the question they are asked is "Are you going to Buccleugh or St Columba's?" There was a third congregation in Leith but it wasn't often included as a viable option alongside the others.

**Ann: So in terms of rebuild or closure where did you begin?**

Alasdair: Not long after I accepted the call an amazing legacy was left specifically for the building and fabric. We put it to good use. We dealt with dry rot, rewired, put in a new sound system and lighting, and then decided to remove seven rows of pews to create an entrance hall. Then we stripped the seats where poor varnish literally had had people stuck to the pews! All this work was done by members themselves over the course of a year. It is phenomenal what 4 retired men and some others have done. It has been very good for the morale of the congregation giving them a sense of ownership, and faith that now we are going to do something in and with this building.

**Ann: That's actually a tremendous amount to have accomplished in such a short time. Transformation of the building will make it so much more inviting for outsiders and newcomers. Have you seen folk come in?**

Alasdair: We are now about 45 on a Sunday morning and about 20 at the Prayer Meeting. That is not because we have been evangelistically active but because Free Church people have come to support us, or Christians living nearby have identified with us.

**Ann: So you are addressing the challenge in terms of the Free Church already, but what about the challenge in terms of the community?**

Alasdair: Basically we need to make known our very existence. We discovered that even the local police station could not direct friends of ours here. In this first year I have been getting to know Christians in the community, the Baptists, Pentecostals, City Mission, and Bethany who work among the homeless. We want to get alongside each other; we are starting a monthly ministry prayer meeting; the Baptists and I have exchanged pulpits. These links with other Christians are very important when you have been a very small declining and isolated Christian group. It has given our folk a sense of support and a vision of the wider church community, and of what is happening here in terms of mission. It's a start.

From there I would hope to involve folk in work groups and teams for hospitality and mission. A newcomer to the congregation gave a gift of £1,000 to start a mission fund to begin to buy materials for outreach. A minister friend in America has offered a team of young people to come in 2001 to run a mission for us, which is very humbling.

**Ann: So there is a community here to be evangelised.**

Alasdair: This is a very diverse community. There are the social problems of homelessness, prostitution, poverty on our doorstep but we have also lots of yuppie flats. When Tony Blair was in Edinburgh he lunched in Leith! The Scottish Office and the Royal Yacht are here....Leith has a distinctive identity of its own and there is a great deal of community regeneration. If we could see the spiritual regeneration as well that would be wonderful.

**Ann: Have you developed a longer term strategy and vision for this particular parish or have you let the priorities evolve and develop as you have established your ministry?**

Alasdair: Of course I had hopes and dreams coming here. It was very important to take people with me. I was primarily called to teach and pastor them and they were the group who had faithfully kept the place open all these years. It has been an unfolding pattern so that now as folk have come we can organise a mission team. I would love to think that in a year or two I could have an evangelist working alongside me. That isn't too likely in the Free Church set up. Otherwise maybe in a few years I should be followed by someone with evangelistic gifts who would have a group of committed members ready to make a real impact.

**Ann: What advice would you give to people who are ministering in very discouraging situations numerically and spiritually?**

Alasdair: The first words that come to mind are "Hang on, hang on to God". It's also essential to have someone to share with, pray with and have fellowship. Some folk in that setting regularly talk, e-mail, eat together, sharing similar situ-

ations. Some congregations, geographically close, cooperate together, sharing youth work for example. Many of the things that are most significant are not easily perceptible. Someone's coming to faith may take years and a lot of the things that are most valuable you can't quantify. Your conversation with a person over a couple of hours may be the most significant point in their lives in the light of eternity. I think we have to keep doing the simple things, the basic things faithfully. I am an ordinary minister in an ordinary situation but we have an extraordinary God.

*Ann: Elder Memorial is on the geographical map of Leith, but all the signs are that under this ministry it will figure on the spiritual map of people's lives in a major way.*

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## Book Reviews

### **Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult**

Nick Pollard

Leicester, IVP, 1997. 189pp, £6.99  
ISBN 0 85111 181 5

Despite its title, this is not a simplistic approach to the subject of evangelism. Its main sections provide guidance on dealing with people at four different levels; those who don't seem interested; those who want to find out about Jesus; those who have difficult questions; and those who want to become Christians.

Pollard begins by describing a way of working with non Christians, reminiscent of the apologetics technique taught by Francis Schaeffer. The author calls it "Positive Deconstruction". Instead of defensively justifying our faith, we are encouraged to go on the attack as it were. Whether or not they realise it, everyone has a particular world view derived from their background, experience etc. We are to uncover the unbeliever's world view and systematically dismantle it until its inadequacy is exposed. Then the questions that follow can be dealt with by reference to our own Christian belief system. A shorthand explanation is given of typical world views in our postmodern and post-Christian pick and mix culture. Two important consequences follow for today's generation, a reluctance to think clearly about their world view, and a failure to look at explicit absolute claims or demands.

The second part moves on to the business of explaining the gospel. Pollard suggests Canon John Chapman's gospel summary as a helpful tool.

Genesis 1 and 2—God set it up; Genesis 3—We mucked it up; Genesis 4 to Malachi—God called us back; Matthew to John—God came Himself; Acts to Jude—God grows relationships; Revelation—God's going to sort it out.

Part 3 is "Helping people with difficult questions" and follows a more traditional apologetics line. Topics like suffering, the accuracy of the Bible etc. are dealt with in this section.

The final part, just some seven pages

long, provides well worn but useful advice on how to lead someone to faith in Christ.

For anyone seeking to share their faith with today's generation, this little book provides an excellent introduction to understanding where people are at, and how to contextualise the gospel to meet their need.

*John Campbell, Glasgow*

### **Upon this Rock**

Samuel G. Freedman

Harper Collins, New York, 1993,  
373pp., \$22.50;  
ISBN 0-06-01 6610 X

This remarkable book, subtitled 'The Miracles of a Black Church', is a candid biographical portrait of an African-American church being renewed out of crisis. The author Samuel Freedman, a respected reporter, teacher and prize-winner confesses to being an outsider - a white and a Jew. As a result of the pastor giving permission to freely investigate all aspects over a year, we have an insider's view that carries both the painful and the personal about a church with a troubled history in a troubled borough of New York City. The story of St. Paul's Community Church is told with awareness of its African slave heritage and charts the steps that have led it to its astonishing growth and influence upon families, men and victims of the drug culture of a rundown neighbourhood in East Brooklyn.

The reader will be treated to biographical accounts of two women seeking justice from the judicial system, a drug addict's recovery leading to ministry, a social mis-fit who found acceptance and affirmation, a grandmother's love for children from the streets and how a 'hugging' church coped with an accusation of child abuse. Moreover the ministry that connects all these belongs to the visionary pastor, Johnny Ray Youngblood, whose own reconciliation with his father and son of a previous relationship is told with candour. His vision of God and life in the world guided the growth of a fellowship which affirms men and families, values listening and learning, cares for

the community without patronising and has developed a successful school and hundreds upon hundreds of owner-occupied homes. Having discovered God from the pulpit, this church is found in the streets where its spirituality of activism is summed up by one of the pastor's T-shirts that says: 'just do it'.

The motive behind the pastor's interest in having this story told was to convey something of the church's struggles as well as its successes. As a result, the reader is invited to enter into a world of intractable problems and hopelessness and to observe that with God all things are possible. Also by openly confessing his shortcomings as a man, the pastor offers a realistic portrait of a leader in the mould of a King David. This book is about enabling ministry that is not 'whiter than white', and many wounded pastors will find healing from the story of Johnny Ray Youngblood.

The great message of this book, which is relevant for many cultures other than African-American, is in the masculinity of God. Indeed it seems that Rev. Youngblood is even more disappointed in himself as a father than in the empty rhetoric of politicians and police. Through his transparent way of learning to both have a father and be a father, other men respond and St. Paul's Community Church is built somewhat in the pastor's own image.

I recommend this volume as a handbook of practical theology which is essential reading for pastors and the new generation of leaders that our nations so desperately need. There is exposure to some of the pastor's sermons and (over pages 182-191) the reader is treated to the art of preaching and in particular how to "de-miraculize the miracle". Similarly Rev. Youngblood, who confesses to have learned much from T.V.'s forensic pathologist "Quincy", provides a detailed model of marriage counselling (over pages 274-283) which he regards as precautionary... "Better to find the fault lines now than to discover them only after the earthquake when the damage may not be repairable". The pastor is a man for the community, a man of leadership retreats and a man of prayer, and I wish that I

had been able to read this story in my previous housing-estate parish in Glasgow. Before an important decision is made, he is heard to say at an elder's meeting: "Anyone whose knees aren't dusty and dirty can't have a say."

If you come to this book seeking programmes that work or formulas to fit, you will be disappointed. The challenge of this book to every pastor is to be in the real world and to build church and community at the same time. To those who fear that the African-American context rules against its relevance to them, I would suggest that it is worth reading simply for its accounts of personal struggle and the message of hope.

There is much more to learn from the African-American tradition in its reconciliation of sacred and secular, respect for ancestry and reality of fellowship. This book is greatly enhanced by a full bibliography of Freedman's up-to-date sources. I fear that some will be offended by Rev. Youngblood's intemperate language, but many more will be drawn (as I am) by his personal discipline and integrity, his understanding of people and utter dependence upon God. Perhaps it is the spirit of the community activist in me, but I like the way that he walks his walk and talks his talk.

*Robert Calvert, Amsterdam*

### **Christ Triumphant: Biblical Perspectives on His Church and Kingdom**

Raymond O Zorn  
Edinburgh, Banner Of Truth, 1997,  
244pp, £12.95  
ISBN 085151 6963

This revised edition of an earlier work, called *Church and Kingdom*, is a theological treatise on the biblical concepts of the Church and the kingdom of God and their relationship towards each other. With the rise, in charismatic circles, of a triumphalistic and esoteric interpretation of the Kingdom of God this book forms a welcome and helpful antidote.

As a theological treatise it is technical and sophisticated in terms of both its argument and its language. It is not the

sort of book that makes for light bedside reading and has to be read with care and attention.

The first part of the book offers a biblical definition of the kingdom of God and the church and in doing this offered contrast and comparison. The focus of this section was very much set in history of salvation.

The second part deals with the church's role in the order of salvation in this present age which consisted of a brief but succinct defence of Amillennialism. This section then returns to the history of salvation and looks at the final victory of Christ. The final section seeks to propound a practical guide as to the role of the church in this present order. It roots this very much in the church's relationship with the different spheres of the individual, the family, the state and society. In this section there is an excursus on theonomy which contributes a helpful critique.

The theological position of the book is soundly orthodox and would hold no surprises for those of a reformed position. As a reference work on this subject it is a worth while purchase.

*John A Willby, Gorseinon*

### **The Lost Art of Forgiving**

Johann Christoph Arnold  
The Plough Publishing  
House, Farmington, PA 15437, 1998,  
149pp, £7.99  
ISBN 0 87486 950 1

Well presented and simply written. *The Lost Art of Forgiving* is a collection of stories about people who Steve Chalke in his forward says, have found the strength to forgive those who wronged them and in so doing have found peace. In retelling these stories Johann Christoph Arnold seeks to illustrate why forgiveness is needed—healing from the cancer of bitterness and resentment—rather than to offer a practical guide for he says 'it is impossible to tell someone how to forgive'. The author's aim is to lead (the reader) to the door of forgiveness which they must then open for themselves. Brief commentary around each story is made by the author and some excellent cameos from vari-

## **Book Reviews**

ous sources are included as introductions to each chapter.

I was compelled to read this book at one sitting, gripped by its moving stories, appreciative of the author's generally non-judgemental approach and heartened that at least in some chapters, a balance of perspectives is included as in the case of stories from both Arab and Jewish experiences

However from Arnold's opening sentence to the end, I had a nagging sense of frustration with his failure to adequately define 'forgiveness'. At one point he clearly contradicts himself as to its meaning. His tendency to simplistic explanation is sadly predictable. Arnold does however refer to the 'mystery' of forgiveness and perhaps he includes the meaning itself as part of this. Consequently, the author did succeed in bringing me to the 'door of forgiveness'—perhaps a different door to the one he may have intended, but nonetheless to one which prompted me to explore and grapple again with what forgiveness is and to distinguish it from reconciliation (are they really synonymous?). More importantly, what does God say about these issues and what is my response to that?

*The Lost Art of Forgiveness*, although containing some Christian perspective, is not primarily a scriptural study of the subject and is therefore a useful volume for unchurched people. It may also be thought-provoking for pastoral staff and lay people alike – to encourage a rediscovery of the lost meaning of forgiveness, perhaps?

*Penny Hacker, Katowice, Poland*

### **Accuracy of Translation**

Robert Martin  
Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1997 reprint of 1989 original, 89pp, £4.95  
ISBN 0 85151 735 8

Bible translations multiply like weeds; we can be grateful for a book which helps us to evaluate them. Martin concentrates on the NIV while including data about others.

The supreme criterion by which

## Book Reviews

to judge a translation, Martin argues, is accuracy. Since the structure, ideas and words of the original were inspired, a translation should faithfully reflect all three.

There are two main philosophies of translation. In formal equivalence (AV, ASV, NASB, NKJV), which the NIV committee call concordance, translation is made word for word, structure for structure as far as is compatible with comprehensibility. In dynamic equivalence (GNB, NEB) the aim is that the modern reader understands how the original receivers felt as they received scripture.

The NIV team aimed for a flexible use of concordance and equivalence with a minimum of literalism, "outright dynamic equivalence" and paraphrase. The heart of Martin's book is to show that the NIV is unacceptably distant from the original. Formal equivalence translations *can* be understood, he says, by the "average literate adult Christian." The Holy Spirit incorporated complexity in the course of inspiration, so translations should reflect it.

Martin spells out seven faults of the NIV. It eliminates complex grammar, adds words, deletes words, erodes technical terms (like justify flesh and body) and smoothes away cultural distinctives. It presents interpretation as scripture, and paraphrasing abounds. We are in danger of losing both the principle and the benefits of plenary inspiration,

Martin has converted me to the desirability of reflecting the originals more carefully than most modern translations do. No doctrine is at stake in the choice, however, and it seems to me that his supreme criterion has to be traded against other criteria. There are real advantages to all of us using a standard translation. Let us hope that translators will be modest enough, and publishers visionary enough, to produce no more versions until 2050; and that the standard new one then produced will take note of Martin's important plea.

*C. Peter White, Glasgow.*

### **I Tell You a Mystery: Life, Death and Eternity**

Johann Christoph Arnold  
The Plough Publishing House,  
Robertsbridge, East Sussex, 1996,  
172pp, £8  
ISBN 0-87486 083 0

It has been said that modern Christians often fail to face death well, so this book is a timely expression of hope in the face of grief. Drawing on many years of leadership in the Bruderhof community, Mr Arnold's reflections on death and dying are tender and personal. Much of his thought is expressed around the stories of family members and friends; the accompanying photographs seem somehow to add a poignancy and immediacy to the accounts.

We learn much not only from the author's pastoral experience, but also from the lives of those who die or who face bereavement. There is a sense of the ubiquity of death, which touches babies and children as well as the elderly and middle aged. There is an acknowledgement of the mystery of God's will, when lives end so suddenly, or so painfully, or so "randomly" in illness and accidents. A constant emphasis on the need to use time to live for love, for it is the love experienced from God and other human beings that can fill life and death with meaning runs through the book.

Most of these lives and deaths take place in the context of the Bruderhof community, which provides a more unusual angle. Not only are families and individuals able to give and receive very practical expressions of care and support, but there is a strong sense of solidarity and faith, so that death and loss can be faced with dignity.

Within the narrative are comments on practical and pastoral concerns, including dying and grieving, healing and resurrection, euthanasia and despair. Alongside the biographies and simple statements of faith and experience are prayers and poems and photos. The print and layout are outstandingly attractive. Reading the twenty three short chapters one after the other can be overwhelming, because the stories are so moving and challenging. Death is

never romanticised. Notwithstanding, the book is a salutary reminder to the living of the important things in life which includes death.

It is available directly from Plough at 0800-269-048 as well as through distributors and wholesalers.

*Fiona Barnard, St Andrews*

### **The Rhythm of Life. Celtic Daily Prayer**

David Adam, Illustrations by Jean Freer,  
Triangle, London, 1996. £4.99  
ISBN 0281048392,

Celtic Daily Prayer by David Adams, the vicar of Holy Island, takes us through the week with a series of 'little offices' such as the monastic movement used in the early centuries of the church to help people to rejoice constantly in the presence of the living God. Each act of worship is complete in itself and very simple to use. The Bible readings are purposely short so that they can be memorized. In the same way, the prayers can be learned by heart simply by regular recitation. Each day is devised to look at some of the eternal realities of God, the layout of the services being basically the same, aiming to give a meditative and structured pattern to our daily prayers in order to strengthen our church worship and to be strengthened by it.

David Adams makes the comment that 'one of the great weaknesses of the church today is that people have stopped praying in their homes' and that even if they do pray that this has no link with what happens in church on a Sunday. Adams suggests that linking daily prayer with a build up of images enriches worship in both church and home thereby enabling us to cope with the ebb and flow of life, surviving the dark times as well as the light. This is a pocket sized book but the very size is such that one is encouraged to carry it around, snatching precious moments to use the book to come closer to God, even in the middle of a busy life.

*Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College*



**Their Blood Cries Out**

Paul Marshall with Lela Gilbert,  
Word Publishing, Dallas, Texas, 1997,  
335pp, US\$12.99  
ISBN 0-8499-4020-6

Scattered throughout Paul Marshall's book are short stories. Stories of Christians who have been beaten, driven from their homes, sold into slavery, raped, mutilated or murdered. These stories are true, and all happened within the past five years. They graphically illustrate the point of the book: thousands upon thousands of men, women and children are being persecuted simply because they believe in Jesus Christ.

The first half of the book focuses on various geographic regions. Statistics, facts, surveys and eyewitness accounts prove that the persecution of Christians is a global phenomenon that is increasing. While Islam and Communism are seen as two of the biggest enemies of the Cross, the increasing clash among Christians themselves is also examined. The history of the Orthodox Church reminds us of their struggle against domination and explains the links between nationalism and religious faith. Marshall helps us to understand the Orthodox intolerance of other Christians groups, but he does not excuse it.

The book then turns inward and shines the light on Western complacency. Christians, in particular American Evangelicals, are severely chastised for their lack of involvement or concern. While Marshall finds an easy target with American Christians, British Christians will squirm as they recognise similar selfish attitudes. After denouncing the inertia of the Western Church, the secular media and government form Marshall's next target. Their failure to acknowledge the conclusive proof of religious persecution is abominable.

Finally, Marshall encourages churches and individuals to get involved. Involvement is on two levels for Christians; prayer and action. A comprehensive address list of organisations is provided in an appendix, however, they are all for the American agencies. It is a shame that their British counterparts were not included. Hope-

fully, this book will be used as a wake-up call for congregations who have been sleep-walking. Our brothers and sisters are crying out for our help. How will we be able to face Christ if we continue to ignore them?

*Cynthia Hancock. London*

**Beginning with John's Gospel**

Susan Harding  
The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh,  
1996, 67pp, £2.95  
ISBN 0 85151

Christians are often faced with the questions—How can I present the person of Jesus to youngsters? What can I tell them?

In response to these queries, *Beginning With John's Gospel* could well be considered.

This booklet was written for children aged 7 to 10, to introduce them to the life and person of Jesus, using the first eighteen verses of John's Gospel account.

Initially, the writer introduces John, the Apostle, mentioning his family, his relationship to Jesus and his contribution to the New Testament. This is followed by passages presenting the identity Jesus and His purpose in coming into the world. These passages are accompanied on the opposite pages by carefully selected Study Passages. The purpose of these is to reinforce and extend previous teaching. Children who are unfamiliar with Bible text may need to be given a simplified form of words. (The NKJ version is used).

I admire the writer's gift to analyse difficult concepts e.g. 'full of grace and truth' and 'and of this fulness we have all received'. For youngsters to benefit from the contents of this book, I do feel that an adult requires to lead this book to or with them. Further information may have to be given about the references to other parts of Scripture and Bible characters.

This booklet could be useful to School Chaplains, e.g. giving a talk / lessons on a theme of light'. With some imagination, the contexts could be further developed or adapted. Similarly, use could be made in discussion groups, thinking about 'What is God like?' / 'Who was Jesus?'

The choice of illustrations and art work i.e. background colours to print, design on page borders, have been

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**Book Reviews**

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thoughtfully and relevantly chosen.

The acquisition of this modestly priced book, bound to withstand frequent usage, should not be a disappointment to Bible class / Youth leaders, Christian parents or ministers.

*Kirsti Paterson, Inverness.*

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**Recovering the Word.**

James Philip  
Fellowship of Word and Spirit, 1993,  
16pp, £1.50.  
ISBN 1 874694 00 1.

Released as one of the Orthos series of booklets in 1993, this concise yet powerful booklet provides some real "nuggets" in making the case for expository preaching. The historical roots are examined, via the biblical and patristic periods before moving on to the Reformation and then to the re-focus of the post war period.

The benefits of such preaching are shown to bless the ignorant, the sick and the healthy alike, before moving on to some practical guidelines. This welcomed stress on the "how" and the preparatory groundwork prevents this becoming another "ought to" booklet with no application and the final passages on the cost of such preaching are salutary. ("In this warfare only the wounded can serve"). A real "find" for those pondering the relevance of such preaching today.

*Stanley A. Bröök, Edinburgh.*

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